

**MEETING**

**CHILDREN, EDUCATION & SAFEGUARDING COMMITTEE**

**DATE AND TIME**

**MONDAY 13TH SEPTEMBER, 2021**

**AT 7.00 PM**

**VENUE**

**HENDON TOWN HALL, THE BURROUGHS, LONDON NW4 4BQ**

Dear Councillors,

Please find enclosed additional papers relating to the following items for the above mentioned meeting which were not available at the time of collation of the agenda.

Item No	Title of Report	Pages
1.	ANNUAL REPORT FROM THE CORPORATE PARENTING ADVISORY PANEL - TO FOLLOW	3 - 112

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	<p><b>CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SAFEGUARDING COMMITTEE</b></p> <p><b>13<sup>th</sup> September 2021</b></p>
<p><b>Title</b></p>	<p>Annual Report from the Corporate Parenting Advisory Panel</p>
<p><b>Report of</b></p>	<p>Chairman of the Committee, Councillor David Longstaff</p>
<p><b>Wards</b></p>	<p>All</p>
<p><b>Status</b></p>	<p>Public</p>
<p><b>Urgent</b></p>	<p>No</p>
<p><b>Key</b></p>	<p>No</p>
<p><b>Enclosures</b></p>	<p><b>Appendixes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Corporate Parenting Annual report 2020/21</li> <li>B. Adopt London North Annual report Oct 2019/2021</li> <li>C. Barnet Virtual School Annual report 2020/21</li> <li>D. Annual Independence Reviewing Service Report 2020/21</li> <li>E. Annual Fostering report 2020/21</li> </ul>
<p><b>Officer Contact Details</b></p>	<p>Brigitte Jordaan, Director of Children Social Care</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Summary</b></p>	
<p>Our corporate parenting annual report 2020-21 seeks to inform the children and young people in our care or who have experienced being in care, our members and our partner agencies about the progress and outcomes achieved over the last year.</p> <p>In April 2020, we entered into the Covid-19 global pandemic. We very quickly shifted our thinking and planning to respond to the need to establish a new way of working that has, throughout the year, become embedded in our practice. Corporate Parenting proceeded without a blueprint for how to deliver services to ensure children and young adults continued to feel held, supported and being able to achieve as they lived through periods of home schooling, isolated from friends and activities that previously kept them connected. As a service, we efficiently and effectively adapted to the new ways of remote working to ensure children, young people and adults could safely remain in contact with their families and professionals virtually whilst also promoting direct contact where safe to do so, to ensure vulnerable children remained in connection with their families.</p>	

This report includes the Corporate Parenting annual updates; the annual report from the Regional adoption agency, Adopt London North; the annual Independent Reviewing Service report, the Virtual School annual report and the annual Fostering report.

## Recommendations

**That the Committee consider the reports and provide any comments on the annual report prior to final approval**

### 1. Corporate Parenting annual update

- 1.1 Barnet has continued to have a stable figure of children coming into care over the last year. We had 327 children in care on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021, a direct mirror of the 327 children in care in 2020, and slightly higher than in 2019 which was 312 children.
- 1.2 During 2020/21 the number of care leavers continued to increase month on month. On 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 Barnet had 357 care leavers, a third of whom (120) were former unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. This is a shift from 2019/20 where 232 care experienced adults, 125 less than this year, received a service from the Onwards and Upwards service.
- 1.3 This year has been unprecedented and without a blueprint for how to deliver services to ensure children, young adults continued to feel held, supported and achieving as they lived through periods of home schooling, isolated from friends and activities that previously kept them connected.
- 1.4 As a service, we efficiently and effectively adapted to the new ways of remote working to ensure children, young people and adults could safely remain in contact with their families and professionals virtually whilst also promoting direct contact where safe to do so, to ensure vulnerable children remained in connection with their families.
- 1.5 In Barnet, we want the same things for our children and young adults as any good parent, that is, we want our children to be resilient, aspirational and independent.
- 1.6 At the start of 2021, we revised our Corporate Parenting Strategy to further our principles in our Children and Young People plan 2019 – 2023. The Corporate Parenting Strategy sets out our promise to our children and young people and says;
  - 1.6.1 We will support you to fulfil your dreams
  - 1.6.2 We will be there for you when you need us
  - 1.6.3 We will support your mental and physical health
  - 1.6.4 We will listen, communicate and make decisions together with you
  - 1.6.5 We will support you to become independent and prepare for adulthood

- 1.6.6 We will celebrate children and young adults, their achievements, identity and culture
- 1.7 Highlighted in the report is what has been achieved during the last year against each of these promises. We ensured children remained in their care arrangements with people who knew and cared for them, putting in additional resources and supports with our partners across the Council to ensure children continued learning and accessing education.
- 1.8 Children continued to see their families through telephone and video contact, as well as face to face contact continuing for children in care proceedings, and on occasions where it was appropriate and safe to do.
- 1.9 Care experienced young adults continued to be supported in the community by their workers, supporting them through period of isolation as the majority of services across the country and more widely across the world closed down.
- 1.10 We have continued our focus on pathway planning and careful matching, developing our 'Who We Place Where' protocol confirming our commitment to placement stability and ensuring we aim to have the right care arrangement for a child the first time.
- 1.11 The large majority of children and young people (241 children, 74%) remained in their same home throughout the year.
- 1.12 During the second half of 2020 Barnet saw the acquisition of 4 hotels by the Home office to provide contingency accommodation for asylum seeking young adults and families. This has resulted in a significant increase in UASC coming into our care and a demand on the system for age assessments which has been a particular challenge with Covid restrictions.
- 1.13 The Brightspots survey closed in May 2021 with participation of 176 (54%) of children and young people and initial findings indicate that the majority of children know and trust their social worker, feel involved in decisions made about their lives and feel safe where they live.
- 1.14 The annual reports of the regional adoption agency, the Independent reviewing service, the Virtual School and the Fostering service are shown at Appendix A-D.

## **2. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 Members are asked to consider and scrutinise the work of the Corporate Parenting Service, and to fulfil the council's statutory obligations in this regard.

## **3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND NOT RECOMMENDED**

N/A

## 4. POST DECISION IMPLEMENTATION

N/A

## 5. IMPLICATIONS OF DECISION

### 5.1. Corporate Priorities and Performance

5.1.1 Family Friendly is a key part of the Barnet Plan for 2021-2025 with the vision of “Creating a Family Friendly Barnet, enabling opportunities for our children and young people to achieve their best”.

### 5.2. Resources (Finance & Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT, Property, Sustainability)

5.2.1 There are no additional financial implications arising directly from this report.

### 5.3. Social Value

5.3.1. The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2013 requires people who commission public services to think about how they can also secure wider social, economic and environmental benefits. Before commencing a procurement process, commissioners should think about whether the services they are going to buy, or the way they are going to buy them, could secure these benefits for their area or stakeholders.

### 5.4. Legal and Constitutional References

5.4.1. Local authorities have specific duties in respect of children under various legislation including the Children Act 1989 and Children Act 2004. They have a general duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need in their area and, if this is consistent with the child’s safety and welfare, to promote the upbringing of such children by their families by providing services appropriate to the child’s needs. They also have a duty to promote the upbringing of such children by their families, by providing services appropriate to the child’s needs, provided this is consistent with the child’s safety and welfare. They should do this in partnership with parents, in a way that is sensitive to the child’s race, religion, culture and language and that, where practicable, takes account of the child’s wishes and feelings. Under the Children and Families Act 2014, local authorities must consider how the child or young person can be supported to

facilitate their development and to help them achieve the “best possible educational and other outcomes”.

5.4.2. Local authorities have specific duties to care leavers under the Children Act 1989 as amended by the Children and Social Work Act 2017. The corporate parenting duties and powers under the 1989 Act include:

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

5.4.3. The Council’s Constitution, Article 7 notes that the Children, Education and Safeguarding Committee has ‘Responsibility for all matters relating to children, schools and education.’

## **6. Risk Management**

6.1. Specific risk management is being carried out for Children and Young People’s Plan. Any Family Services risks are recorded on the Family Services Risk Register and monitored each quarter by the Senior Leadership Team with escalations to CMT if necessary.

## 7. Equalities and Diversity

7.1. Under the Equalities Act 2010 a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to –

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it (i.e., between persons of different characteristics);
- (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The relevant protected characteristics are –

- age;
- disability;
- gender reassignment;
- pregnancy and maternity;
- race;
- religion or belief;
- sex;
- sexual orientation

7.2. In day to day social work this will include –

- removing or minimising disadvantages;
- taking steps to meet individual needs;
- encouraging participation in public life and other activities in which participation by those who share relevant protected characteristics is low;
- providing help and services sensitive to and responsive to relevant protected characteristics.

We continue to closely monitor this, as the reports appended note, in our performance data analysis.

## **8. Corporate Parenting Principles**

8.1. In July 2016, the Government published their Care Leavers' strategy Keep on Caring which outlined that the "... [the government] will introduce a set of corporate parenting principles that will require all departments within a local authority to recognise their role as corporate parents, encouraging them to look at the services and support that they provide through the lens of what a reasonable parent would do to support their own children.'

8.2. The corporate parenting principles set out seven principles that local authorities must have regard to when exercising their functions in relation to looked after children and young people, as follows:

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

## **9. Consultation and Engagement**

9.1 Consultation and engagement with young people is central to social work practice and service improvement across Family Services. Within Corporate Parenting consultation and engagement occurs through the Children in Care

Council, annual survey, Strength and resilience group, Care experienced young adults' forums and celebration events.

## **10. Insight**

- 10.1 Insight data will continue to be regularly collected and used in monitoring the progress and impact of the Corporate Parenting Strategy and Placement Sufficiency Strategy and to shape ongoing improvement activity.

## **11. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None

# CORPORATE PARENTING ANNUAL REPORT

2020 - 2021

## Foreword

‘Our corporate parenting annual report seeks to inform the children and young people in our care or who have experienced being in care and our partner agencies about the progress and outcomes achieved over the last year. Never before have any of us experienced the challenges and changes that the last year has brought our way. I am extremely proud of our children and young people who have showed great resilience, and say thank you to all who care for our children and young people who persevered, taught them at home and kept them safe, and to all the professionals that had to adapt to new ways of working with our children and young people and managed to maintain those important and precious relationships under tough circumstances.’

Brigitte Jordaan, Director of Corporate Parenting

## Introduction

In April 2020, we entered into the Covid-19 global pandemic. We very quickly shifted our thinking and planning to respond to the need to establish a new way of working that has, throughout the year, become embedded in our practice. This year has been unprecedented and without a blueprint for how to deliver services to ensure children, young adults continued to feel held, supported and achieving as they lived through periods of home schooling, isolated from friends and activities that previously kept them connected. As a service, we efficiently and effectively adapted to the new ways of remote working to ensure children, young people and adults could safely remain in contact with their families and professionals virtually whilst also promoting direct contact where safe to do so, to ensure vulnerable children remained in connection with their families.

Covid-19 is widely recognised as being the single biggest issue facing the fabric of British life since the second world war. The Government directed lockdowns, while necessary to protect the health and well-being of society, have had widespread individual, social and economic impacts and considerable negative effects on health and well-being. These challenges created an opportunity for Barnet Family Services to demonstrate resilience as being not only at the heart of everything we do, but embedded in our service delivery and relationship with children, young adults and families. We shifted to remote and virtual working, ensuring children remained in their care arrangements with people who knew and cared for them, putting in additional resources and supports with our partners across the Council to ensure children continued learning and accessing education. Children continued to see their families through telephone and video contact, as well as face to face contact continuing for children in care proceedings, and on occasions where it was appropriate and safe to do. Care experienced young adults continued to be supported in the community by their workers, supporting them through period of isolation as the majority of services across the country and more widely across the world closed down.

Alongside the smooth transition to 'virtual relational social work', momentum continued in our journey to providing excellent services to our children, young people and their carers and families. Building on the key areas of focus identified in 2019-2020 following the Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) in May 2019, we continued ensuring that children in our care remain central to all we do and plan. We strengthened our advocacy offer to all children in our care, continued progressing our placement sufficiency offer so that children continue to move to the right care arrangement first time; strengthening children and young people's opportunities and educational outcomes through collaborative partnerships and innovation and ensuring we continue maximising opportunities and life chances for all care experienced young adults through dynamic partnership projects, with particular focus on education, employment or training and living independently with confidence.

At the start of 2021, we revised our Corporate Parenting Strategy to further our principles set out in our Children and Young People plan 2019 – 2023. In Barnet, we want the same things for our children and young adults as any good parent, that is, we want our children to be resilient, aspirational and independent. The Corporate Parenting Strategy sets out our promise to our children and young people and says;

## **We will support you to fulfil your dreams**

Throughout 2020/ 2021 we have:

- Focused on providing a virtual school that is dedicated to helping children and young people get the best from their educational experience in order for them to have exciting choices later in life
- Children and young people have been supported virtually through a number of different avenues, and all children and young people have been supported with the provision of a laptop or tablet to ensure they have been able to participate in their education
- Developed the Transition Hub within the Virtual School that offers additional support as you move into your new home. During 2020 this hub worked flexibly to support young people who were unable to attend school and extended their remit to respond to the impact of the pandemic. 15 students were supported, 4 with in-reach support and 11 with outreach support
- Barnet Education, Employment and Training Support (BEETS) has continued to provide careers guidance, information and advice for young people in Barnet after leaving Year 11 until the age of 19 (or 25 for young people with statements/EHCP). Bridging the Gap and Thrive programs have continued to run throughout the pandemic and 75% of 17-18 year olds have remained in Education, Employment or Training
- Developed the Care Leavers Project, with multiple projects focusing on supporting you to move into further education, employment and training opportunities (EET).

## **We will be there for you, when you need us**

Over the past year, we have:

- Continued to be there and maintain positive relationships, supporting children and young people in navigating the continuously changing world through video calls and text messages, meeting them in the community and outside in gardens and public spaces and provided online forums for meet ups and celebrations

- Successfully maintained team work in a virtual world through continuing to focus on our relationships with each other as professionals, across different parts of the Council and with partners, working together with children, young people and care experienced young adults best interest in mind
- Continued to provide safe and secure home environments for children, young people and adults through child-centred planning for care arrangements that take into consideration children and young people's views and wishes, including their cultural background, and relationships and connections in the local area
- Enhanced our placement offer to ensure children and young people are supported through 'rocky' periods and when they have a move that the right option is identified to avoid any further disruption
- Continued to offer support to foster carers and family carer to ensure the adults trusted to care for our children have the best support available to them to continue providing the warmth, care and love children and young need to thrive
- Worked together with our colleagues in Youth Justice to ensure young people have the right support available to them when they need it, from police officers to family support workers to psychologists. We are also piloting a pan-London alternative to custody scheme in Barnet where young people live together in a shared house supported by staff to make positive life changes
- Repurposed our children's home to better meet the needs of young people ensuring that wherever possible children can be cared for within their community even when needs are complex. Recruited more foster carers (16) to ensure children and young people can remain local to their homes and communities, attending their school and maintaining their relationships with friends and family.

## **We will support your mental and physical health**

Throughout 2020 /21 we have:

- Provided different activities, from gym membership and cooking classes, to volunteering opportunities for children young people and care experienced young adults
- Maintained mental health support services for children, young people and care experienced adults that meets their needs, including:
  - online support, for everyone up to the age of 25
  - In-person and more comprehensive support through Barnet Integrated Clinical Service (BICS) and through our key mental health partners
- Developed our Special Educational Needs and Disability Strategy and our Autism Strategy to ensure that children who have additional needs are appropriately supported
- Refined the offer of mental health support for care leavers and provided additional therapists to ensure that those most in need had the support they required to manage living through a global pandemic.
- Strengthened our offer of mental and physical health support to unaccompanied asylum-seeking children through specialised offers of mental health and physical health.

## **We will listen, communicate and make decisions together with you**

Throughout 2020/21 we have:

- Enhanced our commitment to recording children and young people's voices and promoting their wishes and feelings focussing on ensure their voice is at the centre of care planning. During the year we supported 26 children and young people to return to care arrangements with their birth family.

- We have continued to meet with children, young people and care experienced adults virtually and in person, ensuring the significant relationship with social worker and/or personal advisors remained strong and supportive to those who needed it most throughout the year
- Child in Care reviews continued within timescales providing consistent oversight from the Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO). All About Me and Pathway Plans continued to be reviewed when circumstances changed and captured the lived experience of those they reflected
- Feedback loops with children, young people and care experienced adults were developed in co-producing the revised Corporate Parenting Strategy 2019-2023 ensuring that voice of young people remains central to our corporate commitment to achieving an excellent service
- We have provided an improved advocacy service as part of the Ofsted recommendation, and seen an increase in children and young people accessing this service
- Continued to offer a virtual children in care council (Barnet on Point – #BOP) and where possible arranged meetings in the community
- Commissioned the Bright Spots Program to deliver our Children in Care and Care Leavers survey for 2021/22.
- Developed the Expert by Experience post in Onwards & Upwards to promote feedback loops and co-production of service design and delivery with care experienced young adults
- Ensured the Strengths and Resilience Group has continued to run throughout the year, primarily delivered online and co-facilitated by the participation officer / expert by experience.

## **We will support you to become independent and prepare for adulthood**

Throughout 2020/21 we have:

- Continued to promote Staying Put and Support Lodgings care arrangements with 28 young people remaining living with their former foster carer and a further 6 young people living with supported lodgings hosts
- Implemented the Moving Forward Projects; shared living spaces for young people as stepping-stone accommodation to independent living
- Developed the independent living project 'We Built This Home'; a series of workshops that will support independent living skills through both practical skills training alongside health, personal care, nutrition, cooking, budgeting and finance
- Promoted the Barnet Supported Living Service helping young people with disabilities to live as independently as possible in their own home
- Continued to provide financial education to 15-17 years through the Step-ladder program.
- Promoted health passports for all care experienced young adults to ensure they have access to their health histories to support them in their adult years
- Maintained a commitment to ensuring all young people have a bank account and access to their savings upon their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday
- Progressed partnership working with Barnet homes to ensure that all young people aged 17 are supported with housing nomination forms to assist their transition to independent living upon their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday or when they are appropriately ready
- Increased our offer to provide direct housing offers to young people in partnership with Barnet homes to 67 young people, up from a target of 48

- Raised the need for more housing for care experienced young adults with the Housing & Growth Committee and obtained agreement for Barnet Homes to acquire 30 units for our young adults
- Maintained the services of a designated work coach in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions who has continued to offer services remotely, and when possible at Woodhouse Road
- Provided driving lessons to 6 young people through our partnership work with charity, Live Unlimited and supported a further 3 young people with their learner's permit
- In partnership with BEETS Barnet Education, Employment and Training Service, we supported 38 young people in further education, employment and training; between September 2019 and March 2021, there has been a 54% increase in participation of former NEET (not in education, employment or training) through our partnership work with Barnet Education and Learning Service - BELS)
- We also continued to run the Bridging the Gap and RON courses both virtually and face to face throughout the year, continuing to support young people accessing apprenticeships, employment and training
- Maintained an average of 55.25% of care experienced young adults remaining in education, employment and training, despite the significant hardship young people aged 18-24 were experiencing on account of COVID-19. There was an increase in those claiming benefits in Barnet (up from 2.5% in 2019 to 9.5% in July 2020) and young people more likely to be furloughed.

## **We will celebrate children & young people, their achievements, identity and culture**

Throughout 2020/21 we have:

- Provided additional support to foster carers and residential workers to ensure that they have the skills and confidence to help children and young people discuss and explore their reflections and responses to the Black Lives Matter movement
- Ensured safety planning for young people in the wake of Black Lives Matter protests
- Continued to run our program of celebration activities through online programs, including celebrating National Children in Care Day in February 2021 and National Care Leavers Week in November 2020, along with a calendar of Christmas activities for care leavers and foster carers.
- Continued to ensure that children and young people's individual care plans acknowledge their difference and reflect their nationality, religion, ethnicity, sexuality, gender and disability
- Developed the Anti-Racism Action Plan implemented across Family Services promoting a work environment that is committed to equality and diversity
- Provided a training program supporting all staff and managers to develop the skills to have confident conversations about race to enable social workers and personal advisors to promote children and young people's life story through a racial and cultural lens with confidence and sensitivity
- Continue to recruit foster carers from diverse backgrounds to support children and young people settling into their homes and feeling safe, secure and understood.

## Children in Care Profile

Children leaving their family homes and coming into the care of Barnet family services do so for a number of different reasons, however for the majority of these young people, it is on account of abuse and neglect. At the end of March 2021, Barnet had 327 children and young people in their care. On 8 April 2021, 36% of looked after children were in care of account of abuse and neglect a similar figure to 2019-20, however there was a significant increase for children coming into care because absent parenting (28%) and family dysfunction (26%).

On the 8 April 2021, 36% of children were voluntary accommodated under S.20 of the Children's Act (1989), 36% were subject to Care Orders and in our care for the duration of their childhood and 24% of children were subject to Interim Care Orders with their care arrangements continuing to be determined by the Courts. Despite the Family Court also moving to remote working there were some delays with the progression of final hearings and outcomes being determined for children, particularly when adoption was the recommendation resulting in fewer changes to the care arrangements for children and young people during 2020/21.

Continuing with our resilience based approach social work practice in our teams across Family Services remain committed to all children remaining within their birth family where possible and safe to do so. In the last year (April 2020 - March 2021), Barnet Family Services entered care proceedings in respect of 82 children, a significant difference from the 138 children who were subject to care proceedings the previous year. Of these 82 children, care proceedings concluded for half (41 children) in an average of 37 weeks, two weeks less than in 2019/2020. The remaining 41 children's care proceedings were not concluded in this reporting period.

For the children whose care proceedings did conclude and who have achieved permanence in their care arrangements, the following was observed:

- 25 children (61%) achieved permanence through alternative care arrangements outside of the care of their birth parents
  - 8 children (20%) achieved care plans of adoption through the granting of a placement order
  - 6 children (14%) primarily older children became 'looked after' with a care plan of long term fostering
  - 11 children (27%) were placed in the care of their wider families by virtual of Special Guardianship orders
- 16 children remain or have returned home to their birth families and will remain subject to continued intervention and monitoring by Family Services interventions, however they are no longer children in care.
  - 11 children (27%) were returned home to the care of their parents under a Supervision Order
  - 5 children (12%) were returned home to their families under No Order

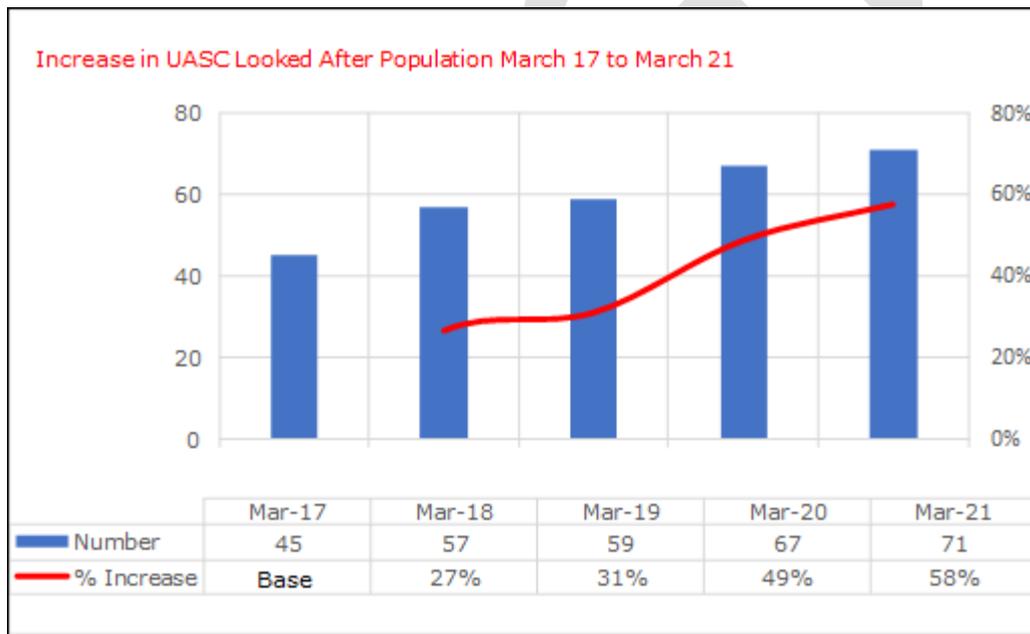
This reduction was attributed to a significant reduction in referrals with schools closed and families living in lockdown, and children not coming to the attention of professionals.

Throughout the year, Barnet has seen a dramatic increase in number of Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) coming into care (see below table). At the end of March 2021, 71 of our children in care were UASC, a 58% increase from 2017 when there were only 45 UASC in the care of Barnet. This significant increase is the result of world events leading children and young people to flee their homes and families travelling to Europe and United Kingdom through various means seeking safety and a place to call home. This year the Home Office acquired 4 hotels within Barnet to use as dispersal accommodation for asylum seeking families and single adults. From these hotels, Barnet has received 45 referrals in the last 12 months from solicitors and charities acting on behalf of young people who claim they have been wrongly identified by the Home Office as adults and are in fact children seeking asylum. Age assessments have concluded on half of these young people with 2 in 3 being determined as an adult, and returned to the Home Office for support and services as an adult asylum seeker.

**Saleem’s story:**

*At the age of 14 Saleem’s circumstances in his home country of Sudan changed and he and his family no longer felt safe. He began his long, frightening 7-month journey separated from his family to England where he was told he would be safe and could be happy. Saleem overcame many challenges along the way and even when arriving in England challenges remained. He needed to let authorities know he was here and that he was a child, however he didn’t speak English or know anyone. He was scared and did not know where he would end up. Saleem was taken to a foster family with 2 other Unaccompanied children.*

*Saleem is now 19 years old, he speaks great English and is studying at university. He remains with his foster family under a staying put arrangement. With the support of this foster family, Social Worker and later his Personal Advisor in the Leaving Care Service Saleem has learnt to feel safe and cared for again. He continues to receive support to help with his past trauma, unique to UASCs as a result of their difficult journey and experiences en route to the UK, and support from his Personal Advisor for his asylum application and housing. Now when you ask Saleem to describe himself it is clear that he remains impacted by traumatic events, but he says he is happy, he feels he belongs and is grateful for the support and compassion of everyone who supports him.*



Barnet has continued to have a stable figure of children coming into care. We had 327 children in care on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021, a direct mirror of the 327 children in care in 2020, and slightly higher than in 2019 which was 312 children.

The following table represents our cohort of children in the care (327) as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021.

Looked After at 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2021		LAC	UASC	Total
Gender	Male	48%	99%	59%
	Female	52%	1%	41%
Ethnicity	Any Other Ethnicity	6%	51%	16%
	Asian	5%	15%	7%
	Black	18%	24%	19%
	Gypsy/Roma	0%	0%	0%
	Mixed	25%	0%	19%
	White	46%	6%	37%
	Not Stated	0%	4%	2%
Age on Starting Care	0 to 10	64%	3%	50%
	11 to 13	11%	18%	12%
	14 to 15	13%	33%	17%
	16 to 17	12%	46%	20%
Totals		<b>255</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>327</b>

There is little change to the general cohort of looked after children coming into the care of Local Authority during the year, despite such significant changes taking place across the world. The only factor of any significant is a decrease in children aged 0 – 10 coming into care down from 67% in 2019/20 to 64% and an increase in young people aged 16-17 coming into care up 12% from 7%. This is likely due to a decrease in referrals from the early years provision and schools on account of closures and lockdown restrictions, whilst older children, aged 16 -17 struggled in the care of their parents and sought assistance and support outside of their family network. Young people that come into care when they are older tend to become looked after due to complex reasons, from escalating mental health concerns to family breakdown. Their needs tend to be young person centred, with mental health often underlying issues. In many cases there have been missing episodes and some substance misuse, and in some cases child sexual exploitation.

## Placement Sufficiency Strategy

Our placement demand transformation continues to be underpinned by progressing our in-house offer for foster carers and supported lodgings hosts. Foster care continues to be our preferred placement option, with the majority of our children continuing to be placed in foster care (172 children /53%).

Wherever possible, kinship foster care is considered with 9% (30) of children living in foster care are with extended family member such as grandparents or aunt and uncles. If this is not an option, the first choice is always for children to be placed with internal foster carers; Barnet has 95 foster carers with provide a home for 90 (28%) of our children. This is up slightly from 2019/20, and evidences the robust marketing and successful recruitment of carers continuing throughout the pandemic.

The below table outlines the breakdown of placements for children in Barnet as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021.

Placement type at 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2021	Number	%
Internal		
LBB Fostering	90	28%
Connected Persons (kinship)	30	9%
Placed for Adoption	4	1%
Internal Residential	7	2%
Parental	6	2%
All Internal	137	42%
External		
Agency Fostering	82	25%
Semi Independence	68	21%
External Residential	36	11%
Secure/YOI	4	1%
All External	190	58%
Overall Total	327	100%

Despite the significant challenges of recruiting foster carers throughout a global pandemic, our recruitment drive remained strong. We quickly moved from outreach events to online recruitment using social media platforms including Facebook and Instagram. Our recruitment strategy has benefitted from this flexibility, continuing to provide an effective and aspirational high-quality campaign at best value to meet the needs of children in the care of the London Borough of Barnet. Through our creative and dynamic use of Facebook live events and Instagram stories we successful recruited 11 fostering households this year. We further recruited 6 supported lodgings hosts to best meet the needs of the older children coming into care requiring support with their independent living skills whilst remaining in the warm environment of a family home.

In 2019, we developed our placement sufficiency strategy (2019 – 2023) designed to ensure we could meet the needs of children and young people coming into care through providing them with the best possible alternate care arrangements outside of their families. This included a particular focus on

cultural diverse foster carers, supported lodgings hosts and semi-independent provisions. Our aim continues to be:

- Replace our current foster carers as they retire or resign from the service. 35% (33) of our foster carers are aged 60 and over
- Increase the number of foster carers (+35 over the next financial year) and therefore reduce the number of children placed in Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA). This will enable more children and young people to remain local to their family, friends and school
- Increase the number of support lodgings hosts (+15 over the next 2 financial years). This will continue to create an alternate option for 16+ young people allowing them to develop the necessary skills to live independently as adults. Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) will be the focus of this care arrangement, as this will ensure they can remain in one home throughout their time in care and support their integration into British society
- To continue to meet the needs of children with complex needs, we have specifically aimed our recruitment strategy at people with experience in relevant professions, such as nursing, police and education. This has the potential to offer family based options for our emotionally complex children and can be a step-down from our therapeutic children's home, Green Bank House
- Offering a respite option for carers that will enable them to manage the demands and needs of our most complex children and young people

We have continued our focus on pathway planning and careful matching, developing our 'Who We Place Where' protocol confirming our commitment to placement stability and ensuring we aim to have the right care arrangement for a child the first time.

The large majority of children and young people (241 children, 74%) remained in their same home throughout the year. Mostly due to Covid-19 lockdowns placement stability remained strong throughout the first half of the year and into summer, with some instability occurring in October – December 2020, at the time when there was frequent changes in lockdown restrictions and school openings and closure. Foster carers, their families and the looked after children and young people continued to demonstrate great resilience throughout the year, and for many families, the opportunity of living in isolation provided opportunities for improved relationships. Some carers spoke about spending more quality time together as a family, taking walks outside and playing games, children spoke about learning to garden and improving their cooking skills and young people shared experiences of becoming closer with their carers or improving in their school work without the distraction of peers in a classroom.

29 children experienced 3 or more placement moves throughout the year, down from 39 in 2019/20 and 37 in 2019/18. Most children who did experience 3 or more placement moves can be categorised into three cohorts, those coming new into care in a crisis, those experiencing an unplanned move because their escalating needs, and those moving back to within their birth family.

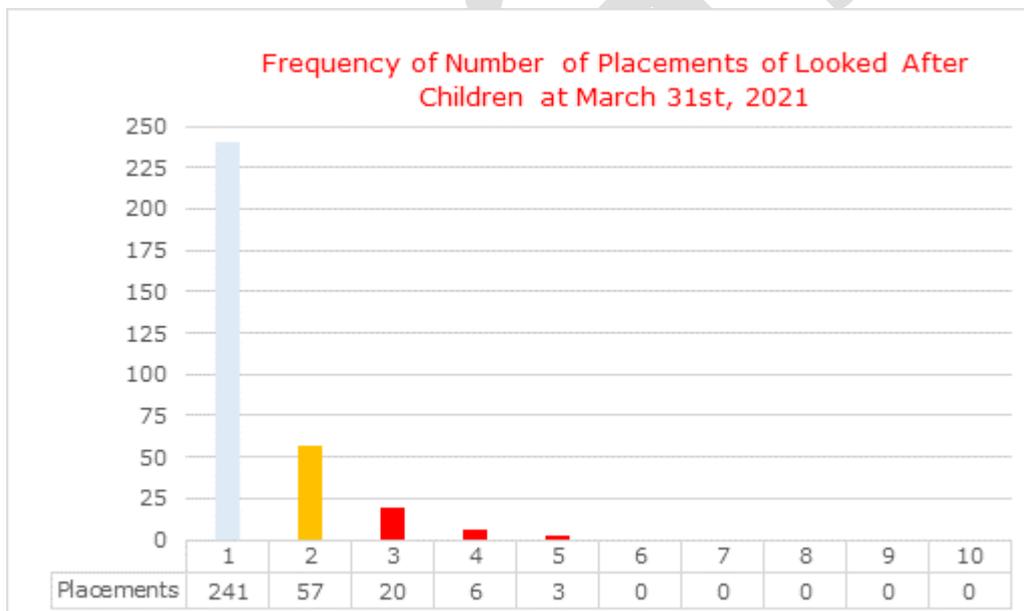
We recognise that children and young people need stability and permanency in their lives and to know their care arrangement is the right home for them. As part of our 'Who we place where' protocol, all children and young people who move placements are now routinely reviewed within our permanency tracking meeting to ensure their next move, as far as possible, is their final

destination. Some moves continue to be undertaken in order to ensure a child or young person’s needs are best met and where they are safeguarded effectively. Older young people, those 15 years and over and who have come into care as an adolescent continue to be more likely to experience 3 or more placements, as their needs change in line with their changing developmental stages.

**Case Study:**

*Roman is a 17-year-old child who came into care when he was 15 years old. He is now in his third placement. He was initially placed with foster carers in an emergency and then moved to more suitable foster carers who were identified to best meet his needs. Unfortunately, Roman found it difficult to settle in foster care and expressed a wish to be cared for by family friends. Following a period of assessment and extended contact, the family friends were approved as connected carers for Roman and he moved to live with them where he has been able to settle and considers this to be his home and the carer, his family.*

The table below outlines the number of moves children and young people experienced during 2020/2021.



**Care Leavers:**

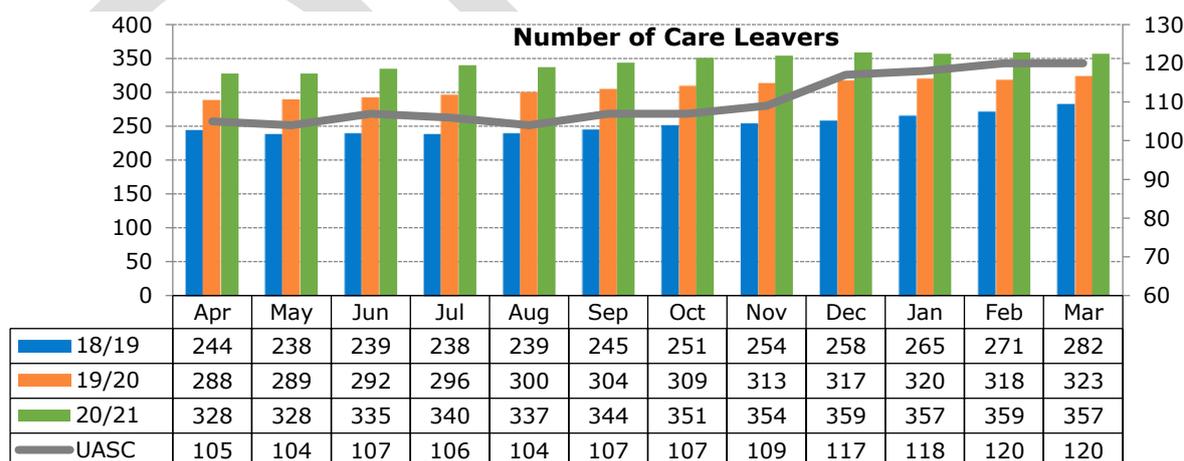
*...for many care leavers COVID-19 has only served to increase the challenges that they routinely have to face in more normal times. Consider for example, the serious and justifiable concerns for the employment prospects of young people across the country in post-pandemic job market. In 2019 care leavers aged 19 to 21 were more than three times more likely to be NEET (not engaged in employment, education or training) than their peers. It’s an unsettling*

*comparison, rendered still more stark by the current crises. Think too about the lockdown and continued restrictions may have affected care leavers...a high number of care leavers don't always feel safe where they live. Feelings of isolation and loneliness for much of the wider population during this year's restrictions are nothing new for many care leaver. As many as 1 in 5 care leavers have reported often or always feeling lonely...*

Yvette Stanley, Ofsted social care blog during National Care Leavers Week in October 2020

During 2020/21 the number of care leavers continued to increase month on month. On 31 March 2021 Barnet had 357 care leavers, a third of whom (120) were former unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Most of our care leavers are aged between 18 - 20 year olds (232; 65%) with 17% (61) aged 21 years old and 18% (64) 22 years or older. This is a shift from 2019/20 where 232 care experienced adults, 125 less than this year, received a service from the Onwards and Upwards service. Typically, the majority of our cohort of care experienced young people were aged 18 – 21 (238 young adults, 74%); 12% (39) were 21-year olds and 14% (46) were aged over 22 years or older. This changing picture of more young adults accessing the service reflects the incredibly difficult year young people aged 18 – 25 have experienced across the UK, leaving them in need of additional supports and services.

These shifts are also attributable in-part to the increased former UASC cohort, who continue to receive support from the Leaving Care service at least until their asylum application has been resolved. The pandemic, together with delays caused by outstanding National Referral Mechanism (NRM) decisions have and are expected to continue having an impact on the timeliness of conclusive grounds decisions. However more broadly, this changing picture also reflects the incredibly difficult year young adults aged 18 – 25 have experienced across the UK. See below table.



Due to their struggles with digital poverty, financial hardship, loneliness, anxiety and fear, many care experienced young people had few people within their networks they could reliably turn to for support. Personal Advisors were for some, their only form of connection to the wider world at points during the lockdown. Care leavers who, previously would have been independent and self-sufficient enough to manage with the prospect of a job, employment, education or an active social life were

unable to progress living independently without their backup of the leaving care service. As illustrated in the following quote from a Barnet Care Leaver:

*[Personal Advisor] has offered me all forms of support during the most critical period of my life and couldn't ask for anyone better. During the pandemic, she has shown me the lengths that she would go to make sure my sisters and I were stable. In 2020, she helped me with my money problems when I lost my job, supported me in getting housing, found an apprenticeship in a field that I wouldn't have known about, AND I got a chance to join a competition for free driving lessons, which I won. 2020 was a tough year but she made sure I remained positive and was working towards my future. I hope to make her proud.*

The Leaving Care building has remained open throughout the entirety of the pandemic. Staff were available every day at the Centre to meet young people by appointment. Their on-site foodbank provision was expanded to operate a limited delivery service where possible, for those young people unable to travel. As restrictions have eased, we have developed a number of innovations to better support our young people to prepare for independence, including the We Built this Home project and are setting out the plans to create an offer for our 21 – 25 year old care experienced adults who continue to need support in their journey to independent living. We have increased our offer of clinical support with partner agency Terepia to ensure that all those in need have access to high quality therapeutic and clinical intervention. The high-risk case forum continued to be held virtually throughout the year, allowing personal advisors to produce pathway plans that best support the needs of the most complex young people with packages of support from partner agencies.

In January 2020, we recruited an Expert by Experience to join the service. Her role encompassed advice and consultancy on all matters related to care experience, including as part Foster Carer recruitment and training. Within the Leaving Care Service, she has co-facilitated the Strengths and Resilience group, enabling this to continue its important role of extra familial support. She has also developed a peer support group for care experienced parents. Care experienced parents can be uniquely vulnerable, underpinned by a group of practitioners completing Parent Assess training this year, our aspiration is for the group to develop as a peer support space for care leaver parents, offering practical and emotional support.

We have worked in partnership with our Barnet's care leaver charity Live Unlimited to provide dongles and tablets/laptops for care experienced adults throughout the year, ensuring that they could remain connected to their families and friends through the wider, virtual world. Throughout the year Onwards and Upwards continued to provide virtual celebration and social events in recognition of the challenges of supporting people to come together during periods of restriction. This includes virtual events celebrating Care Leavers fortnight, Black History Month, Christmas and Carers Remembrance Day. The Strength and Resilience group continued throughout the year mostly virtually, co-facilitated by the Expert by Experience practitioner. Additional sub-groups from the Strengths and Resilience group, including the parents group and the groups specifically for Vietnamese care experienced young adults were also facilitated by the service on as and when basis, and in response to the changing needs of the service users.

## Care Leavers: housing

Our care experienced young adults have previously told us that some of the semi-independent providers have not prepared them sufficiently for the future. In 2019-2020 we reviewed our provisions and began developing alternative accommodation offers for young people. In July 2020, we opened the first of our Moving Forward provisions, a 4-bedroom shared living space in West Hendon with some targeted outreach support where young people can develop the necessary independent skills to allow them to successfully move into their own accommodation and maintain their tenancy. We are now in the process of opening the second Moving Forward provision to better meet the needs of our young people.

More than half of all care leavers now continue to live independently (59%), up from 43% in March 2018 and 44% in March 2019. These young people continue to receive support from their Personal Advisor to ensure their well-being and promote their transition to adulthood and independence. This year we have also introduced the floating support offer on a needs basis for the minority of our young people that may need additional support for a limited time. For example, when they first move into their property or for additional support during a crisis or change in circumstance to ensure that they can remain within their tenancy.

Some young people remain in their children in care arrangement post 18 and prior to moving into their independent accommodation. Almost all care experienced young adults are living in suitable accommodation (97%). Staying put has been implemented with 28 (8%) care experienced young adults remaining with their former foster carer. We have progressed our staying put offer, informed by our recruitment strategy and now are able to offer support lodging accommodation with a host who will aid their transition to independent living in their own tenancy. There are now 6 (2%) care experienced young adults living in this care arrangement, and intend to increase these number over the next year.

Semi-independent accommodation continues to be our main offer of transition accommodation for 16+ year olds. This year, 60 (17%) care experienced adults live in semi-independent accommodation, up from 37 (11%) in March 2020. The increase of young people remaining in their semi-independent accommodation is related to the decision not to move young people during lockdown to ensure they were safe and in familiar places of support given the known concern for young people living in isolation. However, as we move into 2021 with the easing of restrictions and a slow move back towards a familiar way of living, we are seeing an improving picture.

Our partnership work with Barnet Homes, including their review of the Care Leaver Housing Protocol in May 2021, resulted in an increase performance target to accommodate 56 care leavers in 2021/22, up from 48 in 2020/21. Additionally, Barnet Homes recognised the additional pressures placed on vulnerable young people living through a global pandemic and their need for security and stability in the face of a changing world. They used their discretion to facilitate direct offers of accommodation due to exceptional circumstances for a further 19 care leavers, bringing the total to 67 care experienced young people who moved into their permanent accommodation during 2020/21.

We are now working with the Barnet Group to identify the most effective route to purchase 30 x 1 and 2-bedrooms units to be available in 2023 ensuring young people can move into their own properties when they are ready for independent living, and avoid the unnecessary time living in

temporary accommodation. In addition, we consulted with children and young people throughout the year on our revised Corporate Parenting Strategy 2021 – 2023 who shared their wish to live independently and learn ‘how to get my own home’. In response to this feedback, the ‘We Built this Home’ project will include modules in supporting young people to maintain a tenancy, bills and budgeting and taking care of your home with general repairs and maintenance. This project is expected to be launched in autumn 2021.

## Care Leavers: education, employment and training

2020 was a difficult and challenging year across the globe as Covid-19 not only has implications for our health and wellbeing but quickly became an economic crisis, with young people becoming disproportionately impacted. Before COVID-19 the social and economic integration of young people was an ongoing challenge, however because of lockdowns and living in isolation, young people aged 18-25 are likely to suffer a severe and long-lasting impact to employment and training opportunity and adversely affecting their opportunities for financial stability and security.

The percentage of care experienced young adults who were accessing Employment, Education and Training remained steady at 55% throughout the year, showing an improving picture towards the end of year consistent with the easing of restrictions and the opening up of the economy. Throughout the year, Barnet continued to fund the Care Leavers Project through the 16+ service within Family Services, with multiple projects focussing on enabling care leavers to move into education, employment and training opportunities. The project launched in September 2019 and by March 2021 there had been a 54% increase in participation of young people initially identified as not accessing Education, Employment or Training (EET). Despite the challenges of lockdown restrictions and social distancing, intervention and support continued to be available to care experienced young adults through the ongoing partnership with Barnet Education and Learning Service (BELS).

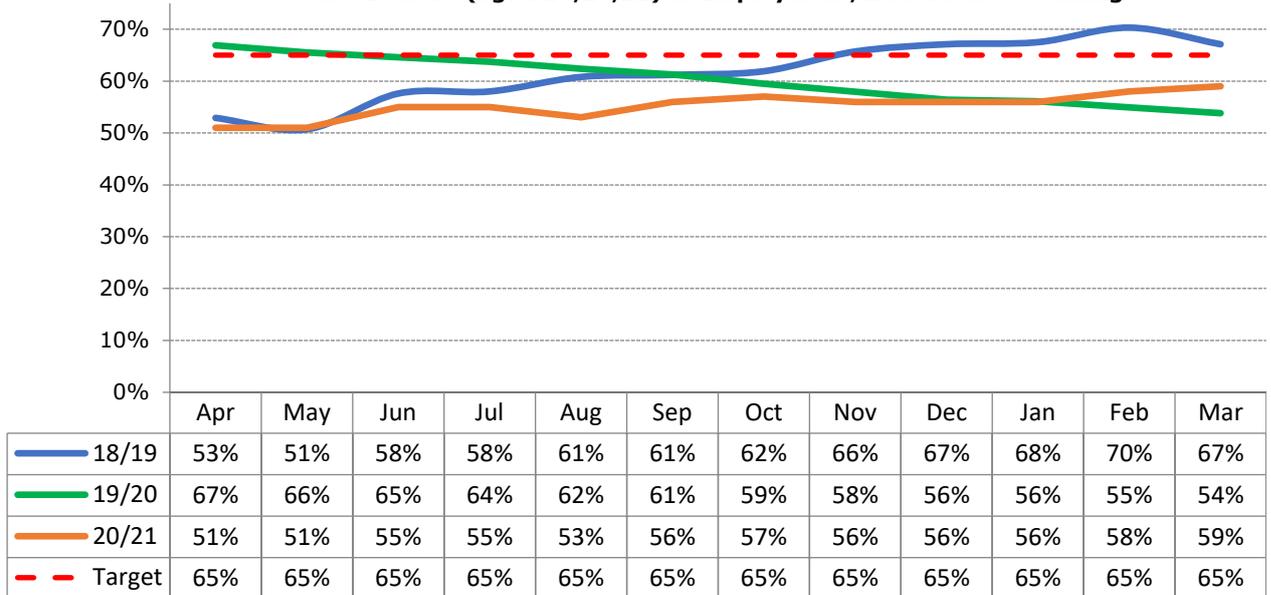
The Bridging the Gap course continued to successfully run throughout the year offering training opportunities for young people to gain access into education and employment. Alongside this, the RON project was launched in early 2021, seeking to provide mentoring support underpinned by principles of life coaching to NEET young people aged 16-19 including care leavers. This follows the identified barrier for longer-term NEET young people being a lack of confidence, something we aim to reduce for our care leavers as a good corporate parent.

Barnet Education Learning Service has delivered the following key outcomes in 2020 - 2021

- 17 young people participated in mentoring throughout the year
- 10 young people completed Bridging the Gap course
- 38 young people moved into Education, Employment or Training (Total of 63 for the 2 year Care Leavers Project from 2019-21)

New initiatives that commenced in 2020/21 include the Elevate mentoring program, with a number of new initiatives developed throughout the year to launch in 2021/22.

**Care Leavers (aged 19,20,21) in Employment, Education or Training**



## Maintaining Relationships

Our relationships with the children in our care and care experienced young adults has continued to be key to our practice and intervention. Social Workers and personal advisors continued to keep in contact with children and young people through the pandemic, through a combination of face to face visits when needed and where safe to do so utilising gardens, public spaces and on doorsteps, and combining this with virtual visits through video calls, online meeting platforms and text messages. All children, young people and young adults’ needs were assessed by their social worker or personal advisor at the start of the pandemic and RAG (Red, Amber, Green) rated to determine the level of visits and support required. This approach was informed by the revised guidance ‘Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulation 2020’ which provided flexibility to Local Authorities in their statutory duties, including visiting and reviewing timescales.

### Case Study:

*Candice is a 12-year-old child who has been looked after for three years. She is a very talented young person who is good at sports and art and receives prizes at school for her writing. Candice has a positive relationship with her Barnet foster carer and thrived during lockdown, working hard on her online learning.*

*Candice transitioned to secondary school during 2020, a challenging experience at any time but even more so when so much of school life was being undertaken online. She has managed this transition exceptionally well and has settled into her new school where she continues to achieve. During the last year, Candice was officially matched for the long-term with her carers, another significant milestone. She has a positive relationship with her social worker and carers and he has worked hard with them to be able to talk about her feelings. Candice’s foster carer and social worker are extremely proud of her.*

Alongside supporting children and young people through relational social work, we extended our offer of relational social work to our foster carers to better enable them to meet the needs of the children in their care. We quickly moved to online support and supervision for our carers, RAG rating them in response to level of need and support in consultation with the child's social worker. We reviewed all foster carers to ensure they had nominated carers to assist them should alternate care arrangements be required for the children in their care, and ensured that carers had access to the Personal Protective Equipment they needed to feel safe in their homes and in the community. Furthermore, we ensured that our internal foster carers had the necessary documentation identifying them as key workers to access protected shopping times and supported them with access to the Covid-10 vaccination program as a key worker in health and social care.

Our support to carers increased, offering additional support and supervision in line with their identified need, but also fortnightly skype coffee sessions with the fostering management team. These coffee mornings continued throughout much of 2020, offering space for carers to come together on a regular basis and engage in an open dialogue regarding how they were managing through lockdown with home schooling and periods of extended isolation. Black Lives Matter and Barnet's Anti-Racism strategy was a regular topic of discussion, supporting carers with the confidence to have open and honest conversations with young people in their care on their experiences of racism and oppression. Online training continued throughout the year for carers, alongside virtual events for Foster Care Fortnight 2020 and an award ceremony attended by the Mayor of Barnet and Lead Member for Children celebrating Foster Care Appreciation Day in October. The foster carer and children in care Christmas Party took place virtually with over 30 fostering households in attendance.

The Foster Carer Survey completed in December 2020 evidenced that 63% of carers felt good about being a foster carer for Barnet and were satisfied with the training offer currently provided virtually. The majority of carers described having a good relationship with their supervising social worker and felt supported, however many felt the out of hours support offer was poor. In response, we have developed our Out of Hours support offer which was launched in Foster Care Fortnight in 2021, providing evening support Monday – Sunday.

## Education / The Virtual School

The Virtual School acts as a champion for Children in Care by fulfilling the responsibilities of being a highly ambitious, proactive and effective Corporate Parent. There is a clear emphasis on the need to raise aspirations and improve rates of progress and to close the attainment gap between looked after children and their peers.

There have been changes to the Virtual School with the appointment of Sarah Deale, the Head Teacher who came into post in April 2020. There has been little shift throughout the year in the demographics of children attending the virtual school as outlined in the table below. There has been a slight increase in children from black and minoritized ethnic groups at 73%, up from 70% in 2019/20 and an increase in children accessing Special Educational needs, with 42 children (21.5%) up from 39 children (19/.8%). The UASC cohort has significantly changed, as noted earlier in this report.

		2018/ 2019	2019/ 2020	2020/ 2021
	<b>Nursery</b>		11	12
	<b>% of children SEN support</b>			2
	<b>% of children with EHCPs</b>			3
<b>Statutory age group</b>	<b>Statutory age</b>	191	196	195
	<b>Reception</b>		4	7
	<b>Key Stage 1</b>		16	14
	<b>Key Stage 2</b>		43	37
	<b>Key Stage 3</b>		51	53
	<b>Key Stage 4</b>		82	84
	<b>Boys/girls</b>	111/80	113/83	109/86
	<b>% of children from ethnic minority groups</b>		70.6%	73.3%
	<b>% of children SEN support</b>		19.8% (39)	21.5% (42)
	<b>% of children with EHCPs</b>		24.9% (49)	24.6% (48)
			O/B   I/B	O/B   I/B
			33   16	30   18
	<b>Number of UASC</b>	18	25	35
<b>Children without a school place</b>		0	2	

Over the last year, the Virtual School caseworkers under the leadership of the Head Teacher adapted their working practices in response to Covid-19 pandemic and the changing impact on education for children and young people. Despite these challenges with school closures for extended periods of time alongside various year closures with students isolating at home due to outbreaks, the team have continued to support the education of Barnet's looked after children effectively and with positive outcomes. There was an increase in school attendance overall across the year, and all statutory aged children were offered places in school in the Spring Term 2021 with the take up better than in the Summer Term 2020.

Over the year, the Virtual School has continued to support young people's well-being, engagement, and achievement in several different ways including:

- Provision of laptops to enable remote learning; since September 2021 over 93 have been given to young people
- Tuition provided to all students in April 2020 for a fixed period to support whilst schools set up remote learning
- Home learning ideas given to foster carers and continued to be a children and young people's Personal Education Plans throughout the year
- Developed guides to support children with understanding coronavirus and return to school
- Enrichment opportunities continued to be provided with foster carers and young people encouraged to participate; this included:
  - o Brunel Mentoring scheme for years 12/13 matching them with a care experienced mentor to support with high education
  - o 'We are heroes' mini magazine giving children a creative way of processing the situations they find themselves in
  - o Campfire Project Forest School supported through Live Unlimited

- The letterbox club through the Book Trust providing a regular box of books to children in care to promote literacy and English
- Pen pal project encouraging young people to remain in higher education through linking them up with care experienced university students
- Year 6/7 transition lead supported foster carers with creative approach using websites to see virtual tours, uniform, staff etc and provision of profile passports during first lockdown to support this transition despite restrictions with visiting schools
- Training sessions continued to be offered to foster carers, along with attendance at foster carer coffee mornings to ensure feedback loops continued
- Termly newsletter sent to foster carers providing useful resources and information to support with home education throughout the lockdown and half term activities along with well-being ideas given to foster carers.

Other initiatives supporting children and young people's education and independence throughout the year include The Stepladder program: incentivised learning program through the Child Trust Fund, with 35 young people successfully registered and 5 full completions since August 2019.

Due to Covid-19 it is difficult to present the key data for 2019/20. The data that is available relates to Key Stage 4 and notes that Barnet is roughly in line with the national average (narrowly above in the Attainment 8 measure and narrowly below on the proportion of pupils attaining a four or above in English and Maths). The rank in Attainment 8 between 2019 and 2020 improved from 99<sup>th</sup> in 2019 to 74<sup>th</sup> in 2020. Children and young people's personal education plans (PEPS) provide a more general overview of their progress, noting the following: 80% of young people were reported to be making good or better progress and 75% were reported to be at least engaged and motivated most of the time. 4 young people successfully moved into university education studying criminology, law, computer science and marketing management respectively.

In the context of significant challenges to young people and their education through the pandemic, the Virtual School post 16 caseworkers have continued to support 16 and 17 year old young people to continue in their education or in training and/or employment if that is their wish. In 2020, 39% of care leavers were NEET nationally, for Barnet, this figure is considerably lower at 22.9% with 4.8% of these are unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people who are relatively new into care. The virtual school works closely with these young people to support their ongoing development and independence through the Bridging the Gap and RON courses. In addition, through work with the BEETS (Barnet Education, Employment and Training Service) apprenticeships in construction and motor vehicle have been of interest. One young person has successfully secured and started his apprenticeship with Galdris and is thoroughly enjoying it.

As we move into another new year in uncertain times, we will continue the need to change and adapt to meet the shifting circumstances and the needs of children and young people. However, this will also be an exciting time, for the Virtual School building on the successes of 2020/21 and continuing with innovating enrichment programs and holistic support offered to children, young people and their carers to achieve throughout the year. Similar to last year, this year ended amid challenging times for everyone, the year ahead is likely to bring challenges for children and young people navigating their return into school and more formal learning environments. The key focus for the team will be supporting children and young people back into a more routine learning environment and working

with schools to ensure the new academic year starts as smoothly as possible to enable our children in care to make the maximum progress.

## Emotional Wellbeing of our children in care and care leavers

Children, young people and care experienced young adults have been well supported throughout this year with a number of online initiatives taking place alongside our usual services continuing to deliver their programs of support. In response to the need to remain at home and isolate throughout spring and into summer and how this may impact our children, Barnet Integrated Clinical Services (BICS) provided several online video workshop resources for children. BICS introduced a new podcast series to support children and carers' well-being during lockdown, and established a public phone line for young people to access mental health support. Topics of the podcasts included mental wellbeing, managing relationships, exam results, emotions and anxiety, emotions and anger and 'what does mental health mean to you'.

In addition, BICS services has developed several workshops to support all children living in Barnet, including the children in our care. These workshops include support around returning to school, transitioning from primary to secondary school, managing exam stress, anxiety around attending school and workshops to support young people with worries and anxieties, called Mind and Mood.

Kooth, our online counselling service, saw between 124 and 170 new users per month during 2020/21. We increased the number of hours from Kooth to better support children's mental health needs, from 528 to 660 per quarter. The service saw a 42% increase in the number of logins compared to the previous year, confirming that children and young people are making use of the mental health services and supports available to them.

For in-person and more comprehensive support, BICS continued to offer social, emotional, behaviour and mild to moderate mental health support to children, young people and their carers through a hybrid of virtual and direct sessions. BICS clinicians are now embedded across the children in care service under the supervision of the BICS clinical manager. Between April 2020 and April 2021, the BICS service worked with 152 children and young people, and received 48 new referrals during the same period.

Terepia continued to offer 1:1 counselling support to young people and care experienced adults. Given the increasing challenges of living through a global pandemic in social isolation, the support offer from Terepia was increased to ensure more young people are able to access the service in 2020/21.

## Voice of the Child

Throughout 2020/21 the Family Services Workforce Development Team has been mapping and collating child consultation, participation initiatives and service-user feedback to inform a comprehensive and meaningful Feedback, Engagement and Participation Strategy.

There is a broad range of feedback, participation and engagement activities taking place across services but, these require stronger coordination and development to ensure that children, young

people and their families see our efforts to engage them as purposeful and impactful. We wish to develop a more accountable process in which we demonstrate how we listen, change and develop in response to their feedback and efforts.

Throughout 2020/21 the Head of Service maintained an open feedback loop with the BOP (#Barnet on Point) Chair throughout the year. While BOP sessions quickly moved from face to face group meetings to virtual sessions at the start of the pandemic, attendance dropped as children and young people experienced digital fatigue as their entire social world became mediated through a screen. When possible to do so, the Head of Service, the met with the Chair of Children in Care Council in the community to review the revised Corporate Parenting Strategy and plan a relaunch of face to face BOP events. A relaunch event took place in June 2021, with a plan of summer activities and a vibrant, dynamic program of events to take place throughout 2021/22.

Other virtual events that took place with children and young people include:

- BOP half term virtual activities taking place throughout the year attended by a small number of young people
- A virtual celebration event for children in care celebrating National Children in Care Day in February 2021
- A virtual foster carer and children in care Christmas Party in December 2021 with a visit from Father Christmas
- BOP Children in Care Council lead member attended virtual Skills to Foster training, where they shared their experience and needs in care, advising new foster carers how to develop good relationships with children.

Listen Up and Coram (independent research providers) have been commissioned to collect feedback and experiences of our most marginalised children with both analysis and recommendations due at the end of June.

In further recognition of the peculiar year experienced by children and young people, alongside the low (73/22%) take-up during the Children in Care survey in 2019/20, we commissioned the Bright Spots Survey in partnership with Coram Voice and the Rees Centre. This survey closed in May 2021 with participation of 176 (54%) of children and young people and initial findings indicate that the majority of children know and trust their social worker, feel involved in decisions made about their lives and feel safe where they live. The full report will be available in September 2021 and will inform service and delivery for the year ahead.

The Strengths and Resilience Group has continued to provide a space for social and emotional connection for care experienced young adults throughout the year. The groups continue to be facilitated by the new Expert by Experience with the support of a Personal Advisor. The group continued to have a core membership of 4-5 young adults attending monthly sessions throughout the year. As part of the consultation process for the Corporate Parenting Strategy, the Head of Service attended two sessions to hear young people share their views on what they need from their corporate parent. The themes from these discussions centred around housing, employment and confidence to be in the world. This feedback has led to a revision in the Care Leaver Housing Protocol, the NEET/EET project and the Independent living project, all launching in 2021/22.

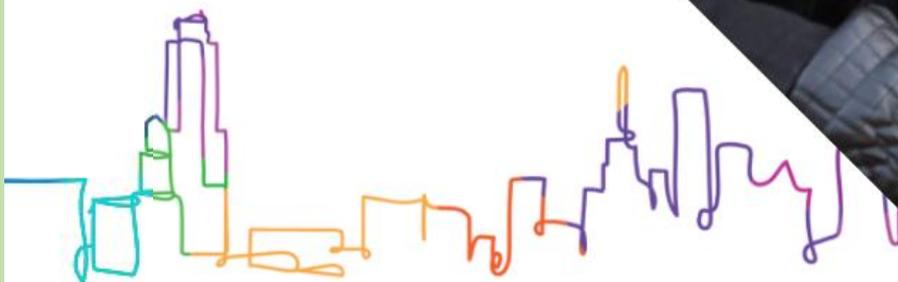
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**ADOPT  
LONDON  
NORTH**

# ANNUAL REPORT

OCTOBER 2019 – MARCH 2021



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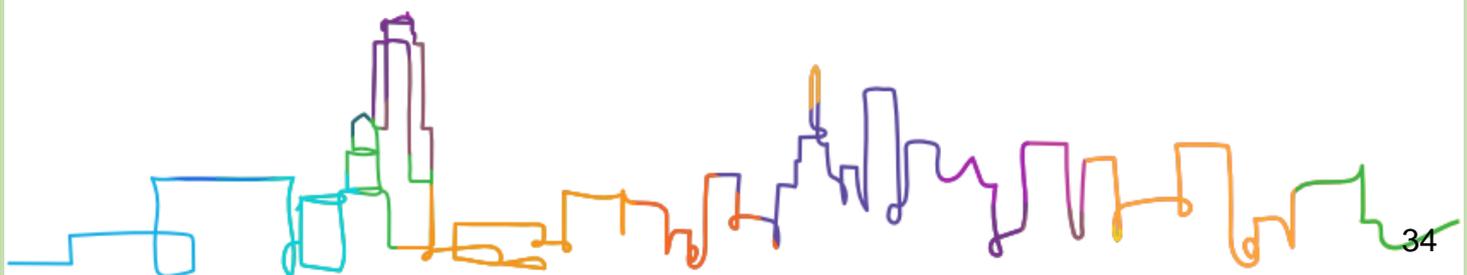
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## INTRODUCTION

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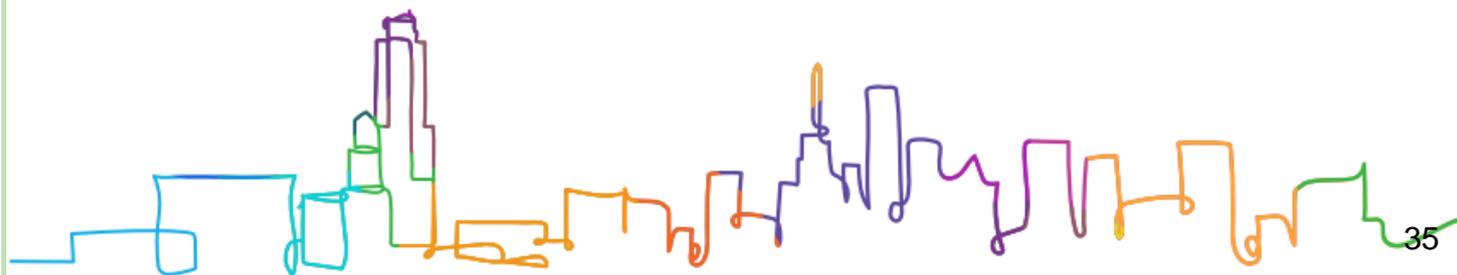
This annual report for Adopt London North (ALN) covers the period from its launch in October 2019 until March 2021, the end of the 2020/21 reporting year.

It has been a roller-coaster period! We were live for just six months prior to the global pandemic hitting the UK in March 2020. In our first week we had 38 members of staff arrive from teams across the six member boroughs, all set up on new IT equipment and working from our brand new office space created from training rooms in Islington. Staff brought live caseloads with them which needed to continue to receive their attention and in total we transferred in around 400 active cases across the service, all of which had to be loaded onto our new specialist case recording system. Staff were working in new teams with new managers, and also adapting to covering a much wider geographical area, working across six boroughs each with their own culture and ways of practicing. We struggled without a full set of established working procedures and with what to prioritise, and those first six months were both exciting and exhausting for everyone. We focused on team and whole service time together, getting to know one another, and establishing a strong, supportive culture. In early March 2020 we were fortunate to be able to celebrate our launch properly with our other Adopt London RAA partners at a wonderful event at the Islington Assembly Halls, cheered on by David & Carrie Grant, who are north London adoptive parents to their son.



Along with the rest of the country we moved primarily to virtual working later in March. We were grateful for our new IT equipment which coped relatively well with enabling this change. One of the biggest challenges and frustrations for us created by the pandemic hitting early in our development is that we do not have strong comparative data to show clearly pre and post covid-19, and therefore to separate out the changes that have arisen from the RAA creation. With that in mind, we set out in this report the background to ALN and information about our ways of working, activity and development work over our first 18 months.

**Lydia Samuel, Head of Service**



## ADOPT LONDON NORTH BACKGROUND

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### 1. National Regional Adoption Agency development

In 2015 the Department for Education (DfE) proposed that all local authority adoption services move into Regional Adoption Agencies [RAA] in order to:

- Speed up matching
- Improve adopter recruitment and adoption support
- Reduce costs
- Improve the life chances of vulnerable children.

Supporting legislation was passed in 2016 in the Education & Adoption Act, requiring local authorities to create RAAs by 2020. The DfE has continued to drive forward the regionalisation programme since. Nationally the first RAA's launched in 2017 and London RAAs launched in 2019, around the middle of the change programme. By April 2021 only a few local authorities in the country were not yet part of a live RAA. Appendix 1 shows a national map of RAAs.

Early feedback from RAAs in operation for 2½ years or more is positive. Adopters report some improved services and staff report improved job satisfaction. Ofsted reports for Local Authorities with adoption services delivered regionally have generally been positive to date. The government commissioned an evaluation of live RAAs which is ongoing, but has noted in early findings the tentative progress in cutting the time children wait to be placed with their adoptive parents as well as innovations and improvements in adoption support services. The evaluations also note the significant disruption to services caused for a period before and after an RAA is launched, and many of the challenges that RAAs face in their first years. National data shows that the majority of RAAs experience a significant drop in some areas of performance and recruitment levels in the lead up to and for a period after launching. Benefits are more clearly seen once the RAA is well-established.



## 2. Adopt London North development

The six partner agencies of Adopt London North are the London Boroughs of Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey, and Islington. The boroughs previously worked together successfully for over a decade as the North London Adoption & Fostering Consortium to provide some adoption services in partnership, whilst retaining separate local adoption teams.

The adoption functions of the six boroughs officially became part of Adopt London North on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2019, hosted by the London Borough of Islington as the lead partner. The ALN Partnership Agreement covers legal and financial terms of the arrangement.



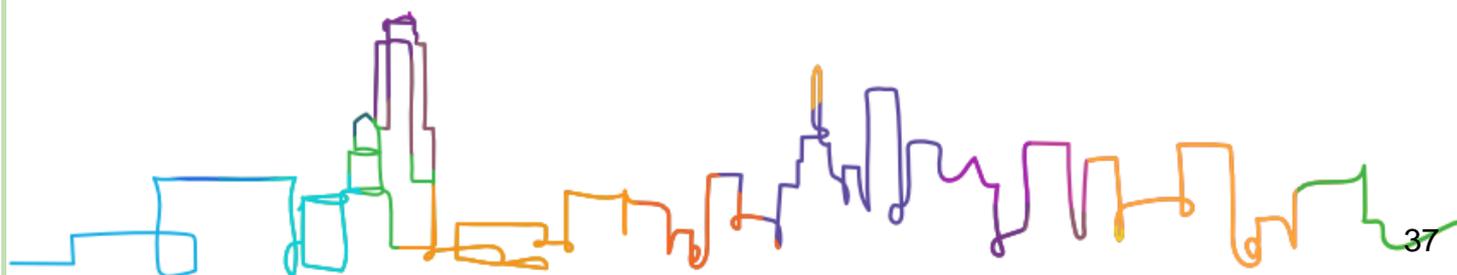
## 3. Scope of service

Adopt London North has responsibility for all adoption led services, delivering these on behalf of the local authority. This includes:

- Recruitment and assessment of adoptive parents
- Family finding for children in need of adoptive parents
- Adoption support to adoptive families, adopted adults, and others impacted by adoption

Responsibility for the child (including corporate parenting responsibilities) remains with the local authority. The borough is therefore responsible for the progress of the child's case through the court system and for final decisions in respect of care and adoption planning.

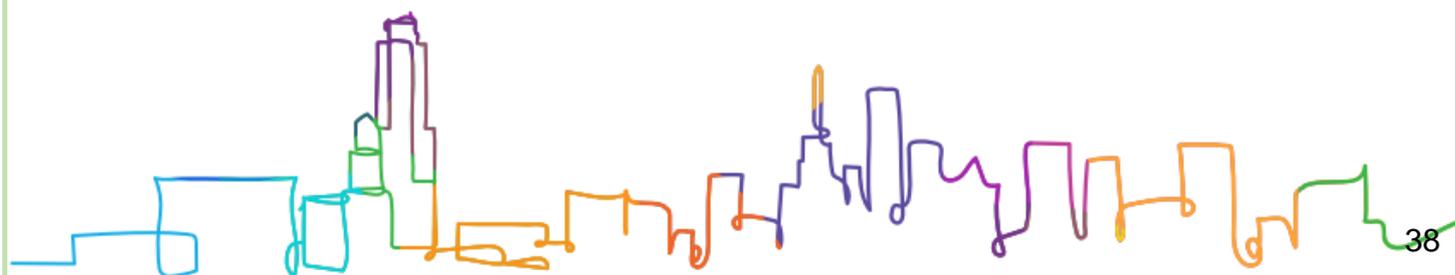
ALN has a responsibility to support the local authority social workers in their adoption work, including information about adoption regulations and best practice.



#### 4. Outcomes

Adopt London North aims to improve outcomes for children who have a plan for adoption and those living in adoptive families in the following specific ways. We will report on these changes as we build up our data over time and will develop strategies to target different areas of improvement.

<b>Finding prospective adoptive parents</b>
Increase the proportion of prospective adopters who are of black and dual ethnicity
<b>Preparing and approving adoptive parents</b>
Improve timeliness in matching approved adopters
Reduce the number of prospective adopter approvals that are later rescinded
<b>Planning for children</b>
Ensure all children who would benefit from adoption are identified appropriately
Ensure that all children who would benefit from an early permanence placement are identified early and matched with adopters prepared for early permanence
<b>Placing children with adoptive parents</b>
Improve timescales for placing children with adoptive families
Increase the proportion of in-house and local placements
Reduce the number of children for whom the permanence plan has changed away from adoption primarily because adoptive parents could not be found within the child's timescales
<b>Providing support to adoptive families and others</b>
Improve consistency and timeliness in providing support for adoptive families
Increase awareness and uptake of support services amongst adoptive families in order to build resilience and reduce the need for crisis support
Provide specialist and targeted support to adoptive families with the most acute needs in order to reduce disruption in these families



## SERVICE STRUCTURE

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### 5. Governance arrangements

All service functions and partnership arrangements are detailed within the partnership agreement. The agreement includes:

- Governance
- Finances and budget setting
- Data sharing agreement
- Dispute resolution
- Termination of agreement

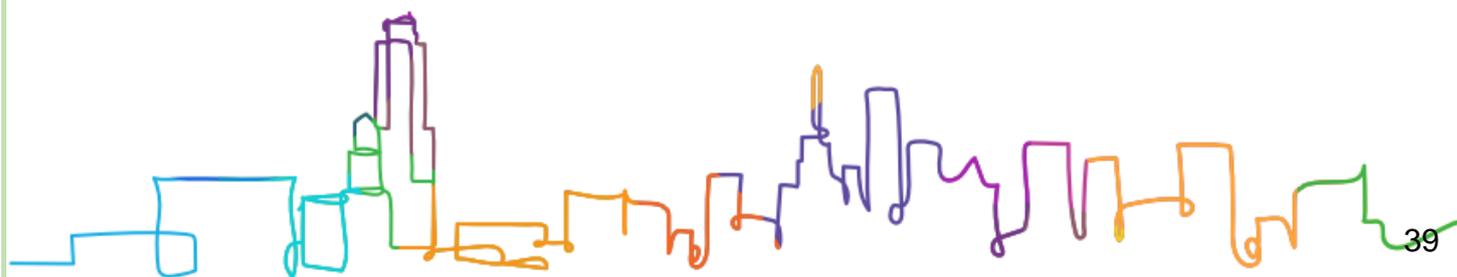
The ALN Governance Board has Director level representation from each of the six partner boroughs. Directors of Children's Services are invited to specific issue meetings if required. The board meets every two to three months and has met virtually since March 2020. The Governance Board has responsibility for all partnership decisions that need to be made above Head of Service level, and for monitoring the performance and budget of ALN.

A Quality Assurance Board (QA Board) meets monthly with membership at Head of Service and Service Manager level from each partner borough. The QA Board has responsibility to monitor and improve partnership working across the boroughs and ALN, including making decisions and proposals about practice and procedures that relate to adoption work across the agencies. The QA Board also considers emerging information about differences in practice between the six boroughs, and where best practice can be implemented across all partners.

Additional meetings are held less formally at Service Manager and Team Manager level between ALN and partner boroughs focusing on specific practice issues, disseminating information and problem-solving.

### 6. Service delivery arrangements

ALN have one central office space at the Laycock Centre in Islington close to Highbury & Islington station. This is a well-connected location which enables travel by public transport to adoptive families across north London and beyond.



An RAA-specific case recording system was purchased and installed during the development of the RAA with all active cases from partner boroughs being transferred and uploaded to the system. Over 400 active cases were manually transferred onto the system during September and October 2019. The data sharing agreement allows for ALN staff to access local case recording systems to improve joined up working and access to historical files, however in practice this has been challenging to implement and work is still underway to find a technical solution that works for all partner boroughs.

## 7. Adoption Panel

The Adoption Panels continued to run locally in boroughs initially for three months post-launch and from January 2020 all cases were phased into a central ALN Adoption Panel, meeting in Islington. From January 2020 to March 2021 an interim panel chair and panel members were in place until recruitment to a permanent panel could be completed (postponed until early 2021 due to the pandemic).

The ALN Adoption Panel operates centrally and considers all adopter approvals and reviews, adoption matches, and plans for relinquished babies. The ALN Head of Service is the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) for approvals, and the borough ADM approves matches for children from their own borough. The Panel normally meets twice per month, with provision to meet three times in a month if required.

## 8. Staffing arrangements

ALN's initial staffing group was constituted almost entirely of staff from the adoption teams in the six partner boroughs. The Head of Service and all Social Work and Team Manager positions were filled directly from previous teams with the exception of one vacant social work post. A Service Manager (who historically worked in the adoption teams in Haringey and Enfield) was recruited externally, and a Business Manager and Business Coordinators (administrative staff) were recruited from different teams and service areas within the six boroughs. Two development posts were left vacant during the first 18 months as a result of the pandemic. A strong emphasis has been placed on building the values of the new service and establishing strong working relationships between staff. ALN has benefited from good relationships between individuals who previously cooperated as part of the consortium, however moving from well-established teams in boroughs into one agency has still been significantly disruptive to staff and they have required support throughout the process.

ADOPT LONDON

9. Adopt London structure

Adopt London North is part of Adopt London, working in close collaboration with three other RAAs in London and together providing services for 23 London boroughs. Adopt London is unique nationally in our close, consortium approach. Through this partnership, we aim to develop a London-wide profile, improve services that benefit from economies of scale, and share best practice. The host boroughs are Islington, Southwark, Havering, and Ealing.

The four Adopt London Heads of Service work together closely to progress shared priorities and identify areas where there is potential to improve practice together. Marketing and communications leads from each of the RAAs also work closely as one team to oversee work relating to the Adopt London brand and online reach.

Heads of Service and the host borough Directors and Assistant Directors meet quarterly as the Adopt London Executive Board chaired by a non-host partner Director. The Executive Board oversees the joint project work of Adopt London, supports with problem solving, and considers Adopt London issues that need the support of Directors to resolve.

Early in 2021 the Executive Board wrote to all 23 member boroughs to request agreement to work towards an Adopt London legal partnership agreement linked to local agreements. This will formalise the responsibilities of the Executive Board and protect the ownership of our shared brand and online resources. This work is being progressed and we hope will be completed during 2021/22.



## FINDING PROSPECTIVE ADOPTIVE PARENTS

### 10. Adopt London brand

Having a single brand identity and one entry point for prospective adopters covering the 23 Adopt London boroughs is transformative for the way in which prospective adopters are recruited within London. Those considering adoption can now find Adopt London easily through most related search terms online and only need to decide between adopting through a local authority-based agency (Adopt London) or through a Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA). Previously many of the Adopt London boroughs were competing with one another for adopters within close geographic spaces. Pooling resources also means a greater budget for marketing and communications spend, resulting in a more professional, creative and up to date online brand.

Through the Adopt London brand we aim to highlight these messages to prospective adopters:

- *'The heart of adoption in London'*
- London children are at the heart of what we do
- Celebrating London's diverse adoption community
- Experts in adoption
- Supporting you throughout your adoption journey
- We are stronger together.

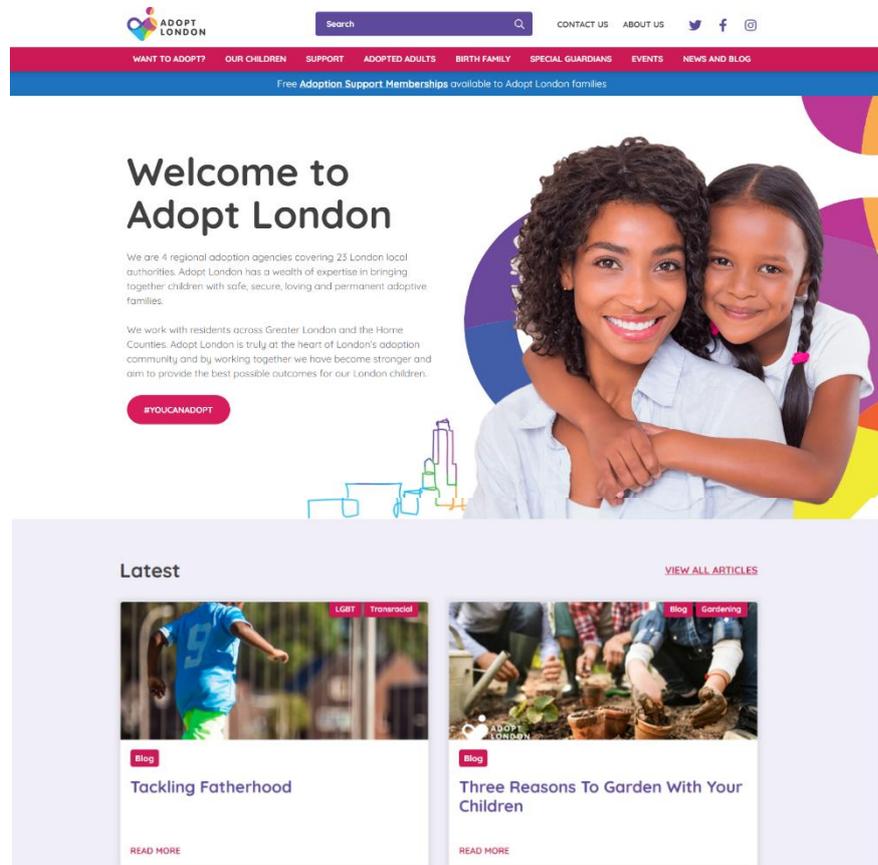


### 11. Adopt London website

The website aims to provide information about adoption and about Adopt London for prospective adoptive parents with news, blogs, and adoption stories being uploaded regularly to encourage people to return to the site and spend time browsing. The website also has a growing range of information for those seeking adoption support, with pages aimed at families, adopted adults, and the birth family of children who have been adopted. The website content promotes a range of perspectives and experiences of adoption, and images are selected to realistically represent the ages and ethnicities of children, as well as highlighting different types of adoptive families.



The website was launched in October 2019 and has progressed from being a new site with no prior views to receiving an average of **3600 visitors per month**, with a total of **40,416 unique visitors during the 12 months of 2020/21**. No direct paid advertising for Adopt London has been undertaken during this time but there has been careful attention paid to search engine optimisation and to growing our use of social media to bring people to the website. **Around 50% of visitors come to the site from an organic search on Google**. Specific digital campaigns launched by Adopt London have created website visit increases of **25% - 40%**.



## 12. Adopt London social media

Adopt London has successfully developed an identity and following on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, with Instagram growing particularly fast in 2021. Social media provides an opportunity for prospective adopters to get to know our brand, and keeps us connected with them over long periods of time whilst they are considering adoption. Even once they have contacted us to get basic information about the adoption process, the majority of prospective adopters do not start an assessment immediately and may take years to consider their decision and prepare practically and emotionally. This makes it important for us provide ways to keep in touch and support them as they learn and prepare, with the hope that they return to Adopt London when ready to go forwards.

We currently have **over 1400 followers** across social media platforms.

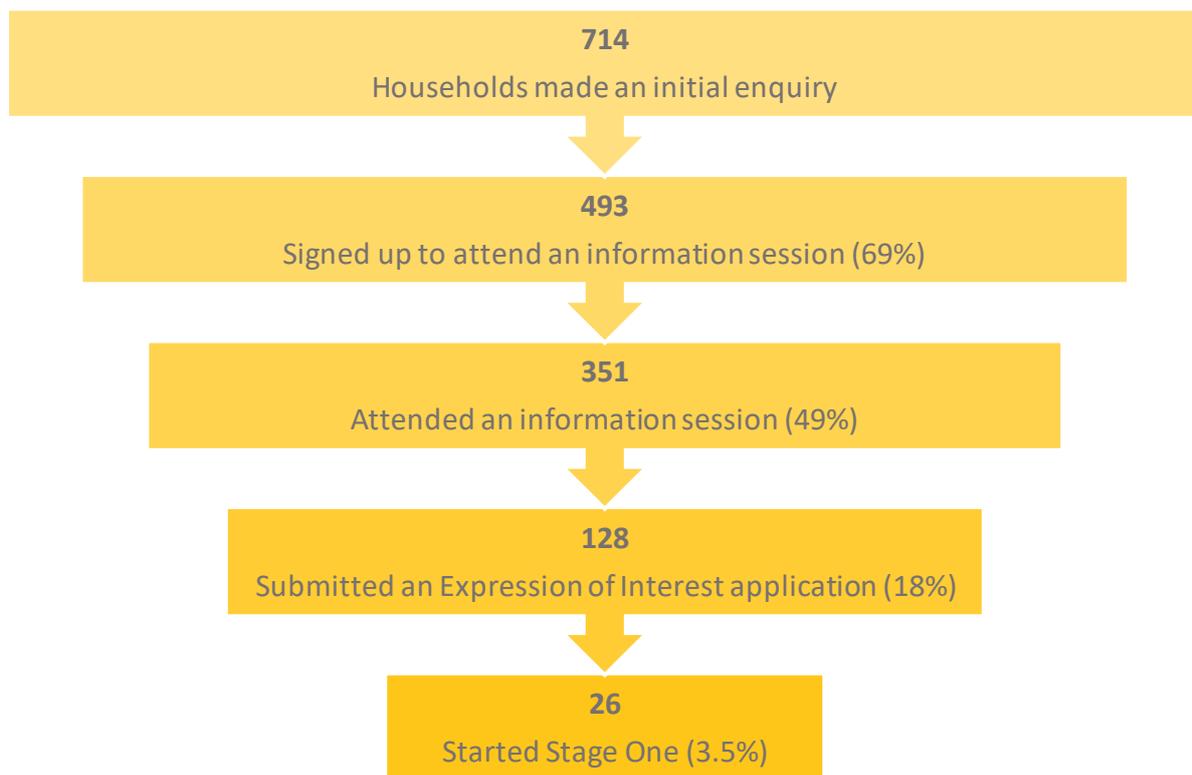
Rather than paying for advertising, the Adopt London strategy is to create original content that will be viewed and shared online with the aim to build our social media reach and the numbers of individuals visiting and revisiting our website. Adoption stories, inspirational or informative quotes, and entertaining posts that individuals want to share, are most successful at reaching our audience.

In 2021/22 we aim to continue to significantly increase our presence and engagement with prospective adoptive parents online. We want to better engage all of our partner borough communications teams to maximise the local reach that they have and to strengthen the connection for residents between their local borough and Adopt London.



### 13. Enquiries and providing information

A small number of in-person information sessions were held in the last part of 2019/20 prior to the pandemic. These were suspended in March 2020 and we launched virtual sessions from June 2020 once it became clear that we would be able to continue to process new applicants remotely. From June to March 2020 we ran **21 virtual information sessions**. Attendees make an enquiry and sign up to a session of their choice through the website. Information sessions run twice monthly, many of them in the evening, and are hosted by an ALN senior manager.



2020/21 enquiry levels have been high, representing a **50% increase** for north London from 2018/19, when 486 enquiries were received (2018/19 was the last full year of the consortium). We do not know how many households attended information sessions during that period. The proportion of households who make an enquiry who later go on to submit an Expression of Interest application is high at 18%, suggesting satisfaction with the information received and a positive perception of the agency. The rate of those who submitted an application then proceeding through to stage 1 is low at 3.5%, believed to be due to the pandemic creating instability in people's lives.



For some people the pandemic has provided an impetus and opportunity to find out more about adoption, possibly leading to the increased enquiries seen. However there also appear to be a greater proportion of prospective adopters who although committed are not yet ready to proceed to an assessment, some due to instability with work or housing, and others who have very recently stopped fertility treatment due to disruption caused by the pandemic. By staying connected to these households we may see them returning ready and well prepared in significant numbers in future years.

In October 2020 in anticipation of a potentially high number of enquiries during National Adoption Week we launched virtual 'Meet the Adopter' sessions monthly. We welcome anyone interested in adoption to attend these sessions and have three sets of adoptive parents online to answer any questions put to them about their experiences. The questions and responses are wide ranging and every session has been unique. The experienced adoptive parents have consistently spoken with such honesty and warmth that they are able to relay really



difficult and challenging information, always balanced with visible love for their children, and joy about being an adoptive parent. The sessions being online in the evening have meant a wider range of parents have been able to speak regularly than would be able to at an in-person event, including single parents and both partners in a couple. Some of our recently approved adopters have attended Meet the Adopter sessions most months throughout their entire adoption assessment, and this has broadened their understanding and increased their openness when considering potential children.

"I thought it was great that there was a variety of adopters from different backgrounds to hear from."

"We attended your information session and were very impressed with the energy and knowledge of your team."

"My husband and I attended the 'Meet The Adopter' event recently and found it incredibly useful to hear all the different experiences."

"We hadn't seriously considered adopting siblings before, but now we are excited to talk to a social worker and think we can do it."

## PREPARING AND APPROVING ADOPTIVE PARENTS

### 14. Assessments of prospective adopters

The number of approvals of new adoptive families has been lower this year for several reasons. The team were working through a number of complex and delayed legacy cases that came into ALN from the boroughs at launch when the pandemic began. Our prospective adopter assessments became virtual, however it was necessary to slow down many of the assessments that were not already nearing conclusion in order to ensure the assessment could be carried out safely and robustly. Each assessment was carefully assessed to consider how many in-person meetings would need to be undertaken alongside virtual visits. Preparation training for prospective adopters was re-written from being a four day in-person group training, to a modular virtual group training delivered live over video call.



*Table: Adoptive family approvals by year for all six boroughs / ALN*

2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
41	31	27	33	19	12

The team have completed a number of high quality assessments leading to the approval of prospective adoptive parents who are more open when considering children, and better prepared to manage challenges.

There are positive trends in the assessment pipeline, indicating that there are likely to be a significantly higher number of approvals in 2021/22, with the potential for further growth in 2022/23. **15 - 19 households are predicted to be approved within the first half of 2021/22.**

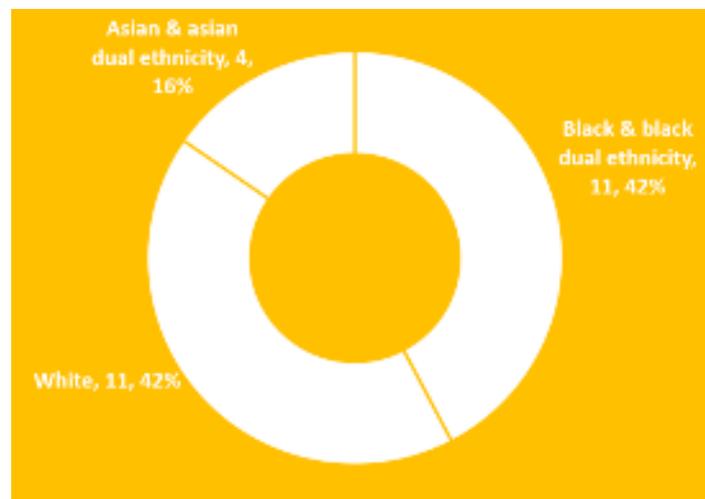
*Table: Recruitment activity completed in 2020/21*

Started stage 1	Completed stage 1	Did not progress to stage 2	Started stage 2	Approved	Withdrew after approval
20	17	0	19	12	1



### 15. Proportions of black and black dual ethnicity prospective adopters

We have looked at ethnicities of the 26 households entering the formal start of the adoption process in 2020/21 and grouped them into broad categories to show the proportion of households approved from black, and black dual ethnicity households (for example where there is a couple and one individual is from a black background but the other is not). These figures give us an estimation of the number of households who might be able to adopt a child from a black ethnic background without the placement being fully trans-racial. Adequate availability of these placements is crucial to reduce delay for black children in the care system. This shows that **42% of prospective adopters** starting their adoption assessment in 2020/21 were from a black or black dual ethnicity family. Proportionately this is very similar to the **40 – 45% of black or black dual ethnicity children** known to ALN who had a Placement Order or were matched in 2020/21. However recruitment levels are not yet at a high enough level for ALN approvals to meet the needs of all children waiting for an adoptive placement and ALN therefore need to further increase the number of black and black dual ethnicity prospective adopters entering assessment in 2021/22 in order to prevent delay for children.



### 16. Increasing the number of black adoptive families

As part of Adopt London, ALN will be launching a long-term project in summer 2021 with the oversight of an external consultant to better understand our data around ethnicity across Adopt London, to reach out and listen to those with a broad range of personal and professional experiences of the adoption system in London, and to use this information to plan and implement changes that will improve the ways in which we recruit, train, assess and support black and black dual ethnicity adoptive families. This project is a long term commitment aimed at building a strong reputation with black adoptive and prospective adoptive families by genuinely improving service delivery and their experiences throughout the adoption process.

## PLANNING FOR CHILDREN

### 17. Arrangements for adoption permanency planning

Each partner borough is responsible for permanency planning and tracking of their children. A lead Family Finder from ALN for each borough attends planning meetings and is able to provide advice and guidance about adoption plans. Referrals for children are made to ALN when the plan is likely to be adoption and the case is allocated at the point that early Family Finding work can begin, usually around the time the Best Interests Decision is made by the borough Agency Decision Maker. The table shows an increase in referrals of almost 50% in the last quarter of 2020/21, reflecting an increase in care proceedings beginning to reach a conclusion for children in the local authorities in January – March 2021.

*Table: Family Finding referrals into ALN, by borough*

	Cases at launch Oct 2019	2020/21 Q1	2020/21 Q2	2020/21 Q3	2020/21 Q4	Total for borough 2020/21
Barnet	14	4	7	4	10	25
Islington	7	2	0	7	3	12
Camden	8	6	6	7	2	21
Enfield	12	5	5	6	10	26
Hackney	24	2	2	4	14	22
Haringey	29	15	13	8	13	49
Total for Q	94	34	33	36	52	155

### 18. Numbers of children with a plan for adoption

Figures on page 18 provided by the national adoption data returns show levels of decisions made for care plans of adoption and how many plans resulted in Placement Orders at the end of proceedings over the last three years (a Placement Order is an endorsement by the court of the care plan for adoption). Whilst there has been a significant drop in 2020/21 in both plans for adoption and Placement Orders made, practice information tells us that this is largely as a result of delays to care proceedings during the pandemic, and particularly delays to courts making final decisions in cases where adoption is the plan as a result of concern for due process. At this early stage in 2021/22 we are expecting numbers to rise again this year as courts begin to function more normally.

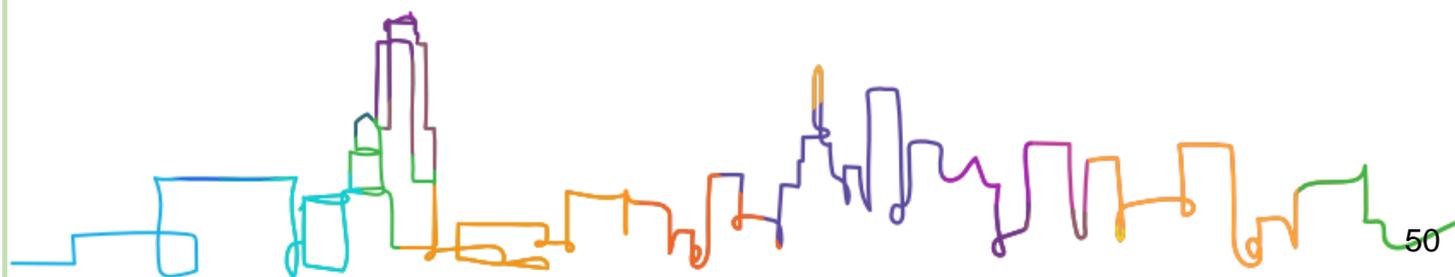
Table: Best Interest Decisions, by borough and in comparison to population size (red) – provided by ASGLB national adoption returns

Agency	Total ADM BIDs between			ADM BID rate per 10,000 *		
	1-Apr-18 to 31-Mar-19	1-Apr-19 to 31-Mar-20	1-Apr-20 to 31-Mar-21	1-Apr-18 to 31-Mar-19	1-Apr-19 to 31-Mar-20	1-Apr-20 to 31-Mar-21
<b>Adopt London North</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>1.67</b>	<b>2.18</b>	<b>1.42</b>
Barnet	10	28	12	1.08	3.02	1.29
Camden	10	9	5	1.96	1.77	0.98
Enfield	15	13	15	1.78	1.54	1.78
Hackney	18	18	10	2.83	2.83	1.57
Haringey	7	13	11	1.16	2.15	1.82
Islington	6	5	3	1.43	1.19	0.71

Table: Placement Orders made, by borough – provided by ASGLB national adoption returns

Agency	Total POs between		
	1-Apr-18 to 31-Mar-19	1-Apr-19 to 31-Mar-20	1-Apr-20 to 31-Mar-21
<b>Adopt London North</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>40</b>
Barnet	10	12	7
Camden	7	7	2
Enfield	7	11	7
Hackney	11	14	9
Haringey	10	9	14
Islington	8	2	1

It is worth noting that overall numbers for ALN provide a stronger indication of a trend in the data, as individual borough's figures alone are low and therefore do not show trends reliably.



## PLACING CHILDREN WITH ADOPTIVE PARENTS

### 19. Family finding

Our Family Finders are tenacious and use a wide variety of methods to identify potential placements for children, relying on a mixture of in-house, Adopt London, and other RAAs and Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs). Our pooled Inter-Agency Fee budget (the costs paid for placements that are made externally) means that placement decisions about children can be made quickly without the delay that would be caused by decision making by boroughs. Prior to the pandemic, Family Finders and children's social workers visited every potentially strong link for a family in their home at an early stage of consideration. As a result of virtual working this initial linking meeting now takes place online and is followed up with an in-person visit to the home if successful. This reduces Social Worker time and increases scrutiny around placement decision making because additional staff such as managers can join a virtual linking meeting at the early stages to add an additional perspective, something harder to accommodate with long distance visits in person.

The Family Finding team have been pioneers in rolling out regular **virtual activity mornings** for children who have a plan for adoption. Children join the activity morning virtually from home with their foster carer and are entertained by a professional children's entertainer. Prospective adopters join the meeting without their cameras on and so are able to observe the children interacting without causing the child any stress or uncertainty. Foster carers have commented on how successful these events are compared to in-person activity days which can be stressful and exhausting. One of our foster carers has provided this feedback after attending a virtual event with her child:



#### For [the child]...

"The day was much easier for her. She remained in the comfort of her own home in a safe space to watch something fun. Although the entertainment was not at her level she had toys around her to play with. It enabled her to be at her best, totally relaxed and engaging in playing as well as frequently watching all that was happening."

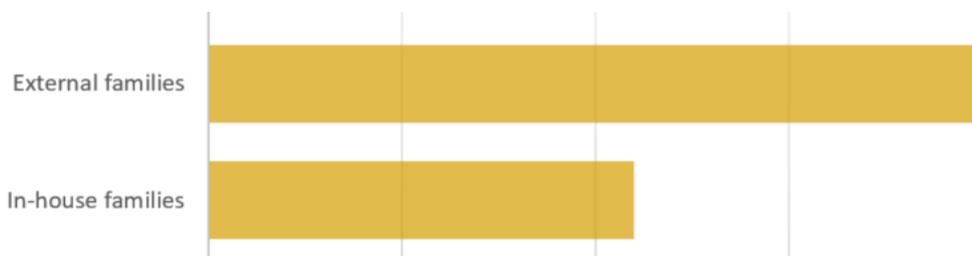
#### For me [the foster carer]...

"It was so much easier not having to take her anywhere. All the anxiety that I get about her being at 'her best' for the potential adopters was taken away as I knew in her home environment she would be relaxed. It also took away the sadness I feel at activity days when no one comes over to talk to us. It was really good to not be able to see any potential adopters. It was great to be able to see and hear the involvement of the other children."



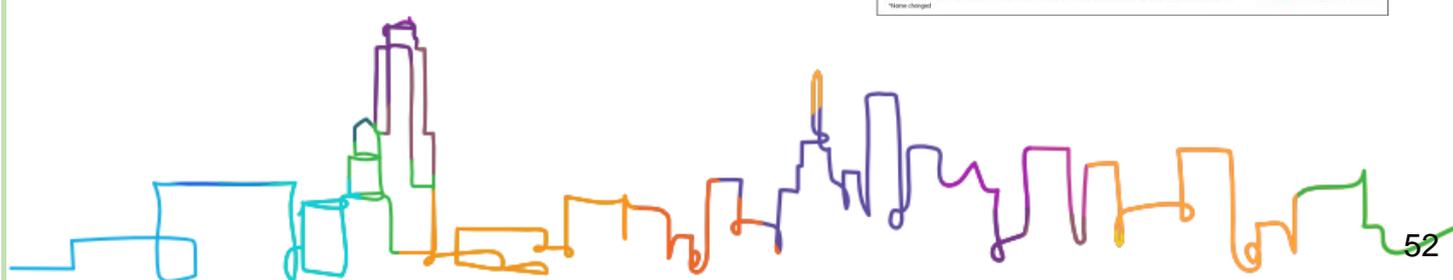
## 20. In-house placements

The ALN Family Finding team and Recruitment & Assessment teams now benefit from sharing a pooled knowledge of all children and prospective adopters in north London. They meet regularly across teams to consider all potential matches and will take steps to initiate an early link prior to either the prospective adopters’ approval or the child’s Placement Order where there is a potential in-house link. We have seen success in these early in-house matches for children and predict increases in in-house placements in 2020/21. In comparison to external placements, in-house placements enable us to provide higher levels of support and scrutiny, and mean that we can quickly problem-solve and resolve issues with the child’s Social Work team if these arise. When children move to an adoptive family who are local it also means that it is much easier for us to visit frequently to provide support after their transition and it is easier for them to continue to have some contact with their foster carer. Around **a third of children (11)** in 2020/21 went to live with ALN families.



## 21. Specific-child publicity

We are undertaking trials to find out whether specific child publicity can be effective for some individual children who have been really hard to find adoptive families for through the usual routes. Careful and sensitive planning is undertaken in partnership with the child’s social work team in the borough, and then a plan prepared by our communications lead in ALN, taking into account the specific characteristics and needs of the child, and the best audience to target. In the two examples shown we have used an artist’s impression of the child and changed their name to protect their privacy. This work will be formally reviewed late in 2021.



## 22. Children waiting for an adoptive family

At the end of March 2021 there were 37 children for whom ALN were actively family finding. We are expecting a high level of new Placement Orders to be made in 2021/22 as a result of delayed proceedings last year, so this number may rise. Regular family finding review meetings are held for every child jointly between ALN and the child's social work team in the borough to closely monitor and review family finding activity and to ensure that the plan remains appropriate for the child. Tracking meetings take place between partner boroughs and ALN managers to monitor adoption plans for children.

*Table: Children with active family finding where there is a Placement Order in place, correct on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021*

<b>Barnet</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Camden</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Enfield</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Hackney</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Haringey</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Islington</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>37</b>

## 23. Moving children to adoptive families

Children have continued to transition into their adoptive homes throughout the pandemic, but moves have needed to be thoroughly risk assessed and planned in detail to reduce the risks of covid-19 transition. Many foster carers are older or have more vulnerable health and many have complex arrangements such as contact that they are required to facilitate. Prioritising the well-being of our foster carers whilst trying to ensure the transition takes place as close to our normal practice as possible has therefore required creativity. Wherever possible those involved have isolated prior to the introductions starting.

In autumn 2020 we started the journey towards implementing 'Moving to Adoption', the University of East Anglia's (UEA) research-based model for transitioning children to adoptive families. This approach emphasises the importance of a preliminary pre-introductions phase and a more formalised and supported post-introductions phase to sandwich the most intensive stage which takes place primarily in the foster home. The team have received very positive feedback from children's social workers, foster carers and adoptive parents about their experiences using this model. There is more information available on the Moving to Adoption website, available by clicking on the picture.



## 24. Placements made

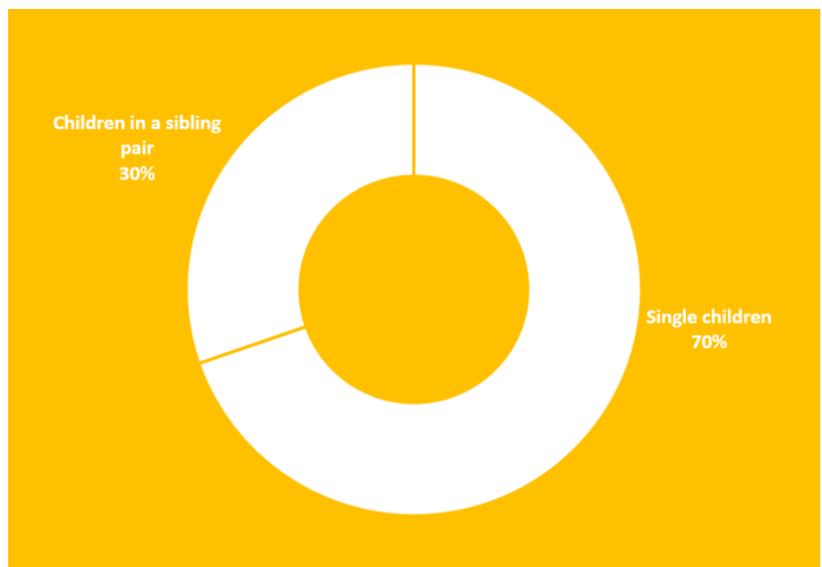
As shown in the table below, the number of placements made was lower in 2020/21 than in previous years, primarily due to the reduction in Placement Orders over the same period (paragraph 18). The reduction was particularly noticeable for Barnet, primarily as a result of pandemic-related delays in care proceedings and final decisions in court. We are expecting a much higher level of placements made for Barnet children in 2021/22 and have already seen many of these starting to take place in the first part of quarter 1.

Table: Placements made, by borough

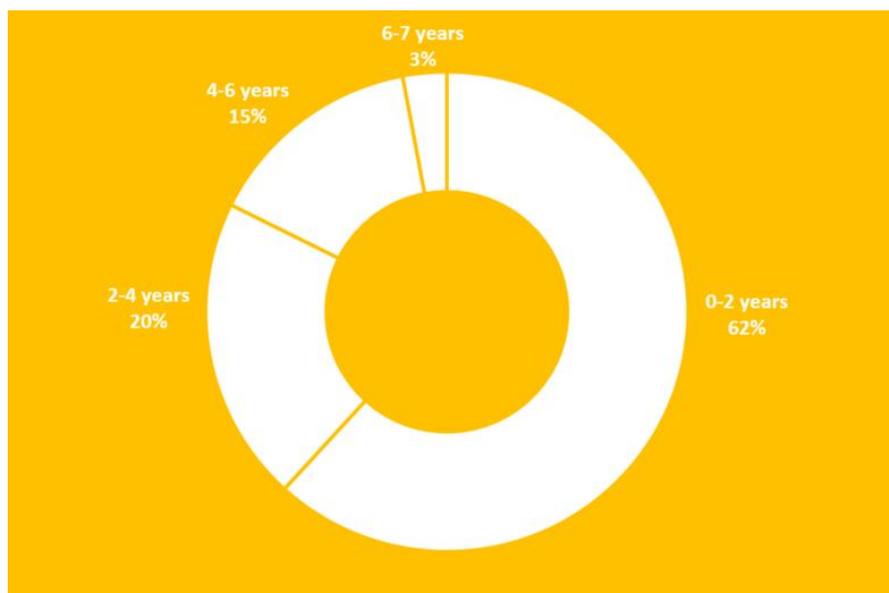
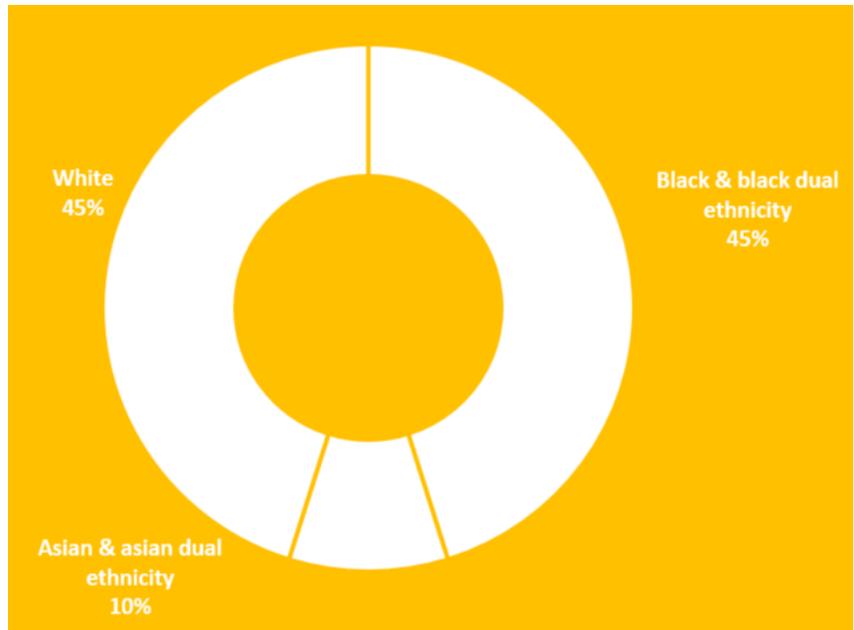
Agency	Total Placements between		
	1-Apr-18 to 31-Mar-19	1-Apr-19 to 31-Mar-20	1-Apr-20 to 31-Mar-21
<b>Adopt London North</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>33</b>
Barnet	14	15	4
Camden	7	4	7
Enfield	5	7	3
Hackney	12	9	7
Haringey	14	9	9
Islington	10	6	3

## 25. Characteristics of children placed

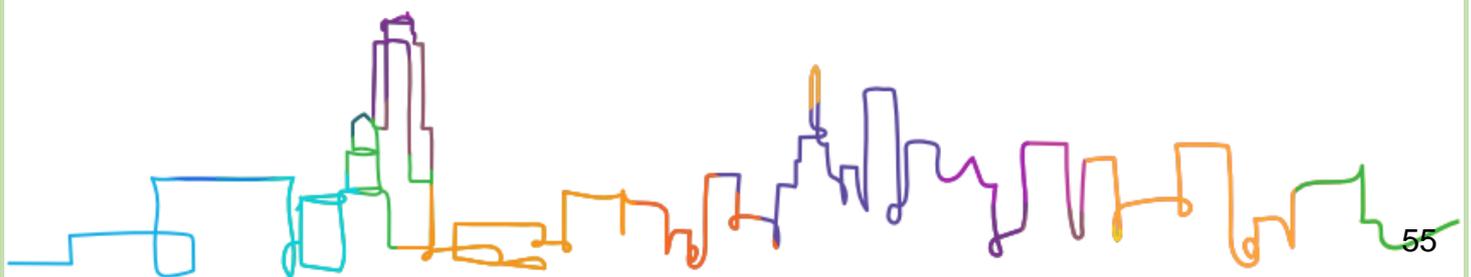
A third of children placed in 2020/21 were in sibling groups and moved to their adoptive placement together, whilst 70% were individual children. We have not placed any sibling groups larger than 2 children in 2020/21.



The 33 children placed for adoption in 2020/21 covered **12 different ethnic and mixed ethnicity official categories**. When these are grouped together into broader categories it shows that there were equal proportions of black and black dual ethnicity children and of white children, as well as a smaller proportion of Asian and Asian dual ethnicity children.



In 2020/21 the **majority of children placed were under 2 years old**, with 85% of those children being under 18 months (around 50% of all children placed). Some of these were placed through Early Permanence and so their adoptive family acted as foster carers whilst care proceedings took place. Just under **20% of children were over 4 years old** at the point of placement, with **the oldest child placed being 6 years old**.



## PROVIDING SUPPORT TO ADOPTIVE FAMILIES AND OTHERS

### 26. Support to families after the Adoption Order is granted

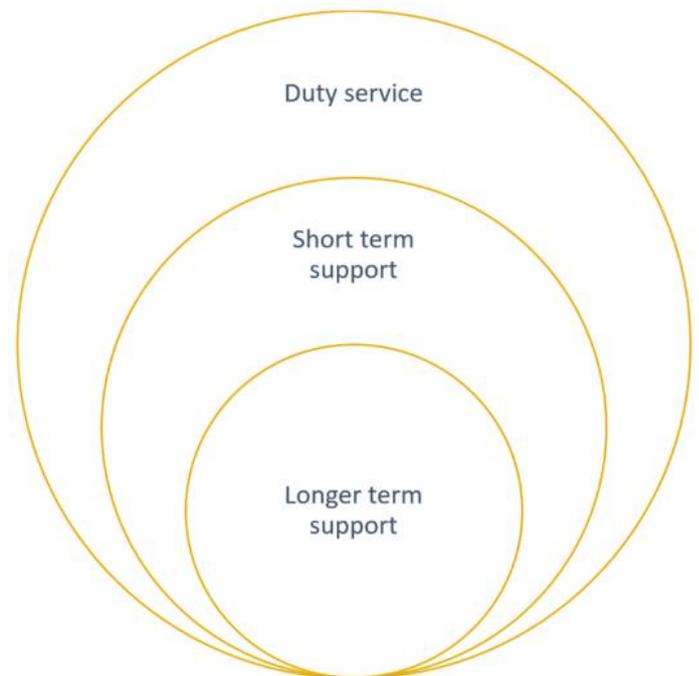
We have a large team of Adoption Support social workers providing support to all adoptive families living in our region and also contact support (between adoptive families and birth families) for all adoptive children and young people that have been previously placed by one of the six partner boroughs. In response to significantly increasing levels of demand for adoption support in 2020/21 we created a duty service to ensure that families can speak to a social worker quickly and that we can prioritise families with the most urgent needs. This arrangement has reduced a previous waiting list for support and is due to continue until at least the end of 2021 before being further reviewed.

"I want to thank you for all your kindness and words of wisdom... Your advice and support was invaluable as it helped clarify what we, and [our daughter], actually needed."

Some families contacting ALN

need only advice or sign-posting, or have a simple request that can be completed by the duty social workers. Others need a greater level of support and may wish to access therapeutic support through the Adoption Support Fund (central government fund for adoptive families). Families needing more support are allocated to a social worker who completes an

assessment of their needs and recommendation for support, including arranging therapeutic support through the Adoption Support Fund (ASF). Families with the most complex difficulties, who can often be at risk of family breakdown without support, are allocated for a longer term intervention with a social worker, who also coordinates a team around the child approach. In 2020/21 **over £860,000** of specialist therapeutic support was provided to adoptive families through ALN.



"I really appreciate everything you and your colleagues have done to support us and all the work that has gone on... You have helped me to feel our needs/hopes are valid, and your kind and positive interactions with me have made a big difference."



The majority of families have welcomed the move to virtual working in Adoption Support as a result of the pandemic, as this is often more convenient and feels less intrusive. Although some visits are undertaken in person (especially when requested by the family), virtual visits to families are likely to remain the most common way of undertaking adoption support assessments in future.

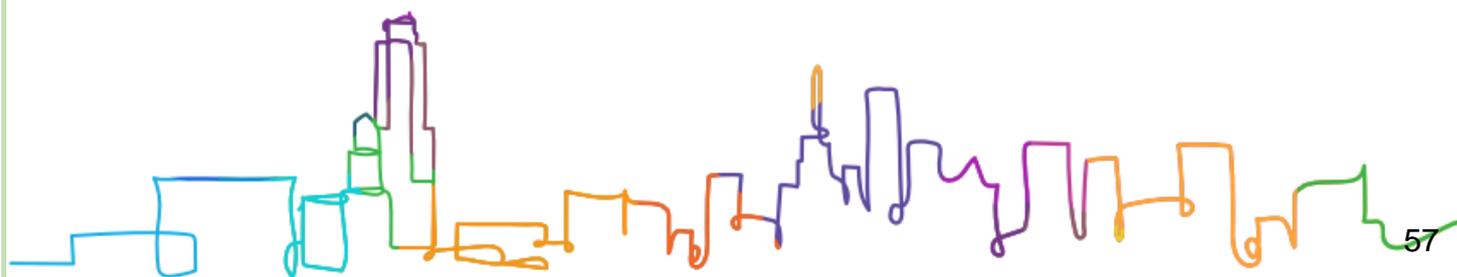


As a result of specific covid-19 support funds that were available to RAAs from central government in June 2020, the four Adopt London RAAs worked in partnership to design, commission and deliver almost **£1million** worth of specialist virtual therapeutic support to adoptive and Special Guardianship families and young people over a six month period. We commissioned an animated video to promote

the support that was available. Feedback indicates that our promotional efforts meant that families who had not previously accessed adoption support were encouraged to do so during the early stages of the pandemic. The support was strongly welcomed by families, who found it quick, responsive to their needs and easy to access. An independent evaluation was completed which highlighted the success of pooling resources and funds to commission services at this scale across London and we have since petitioned the Department for Education to consider allowing access to the Adoption Support Fund in a similar way in the future so that support can be delivered to families more quickly.

## 27. Peer support for adoptive parents

From April 2020 Adopt London entered into a formal partnership with **We Are Family** (WAF), an adopter peer support organisation and registered charity that started in north London but now covers the Greater London area. Our arrangement has been supported by a grant from Adopt London to WAF, enabling them to increase their administrative capacity so they can grow their membership and apply for charitable funding themselves. WAF operate through local groups but in response to the pandemic and with the support of Adopt London they have provided alternative support online.

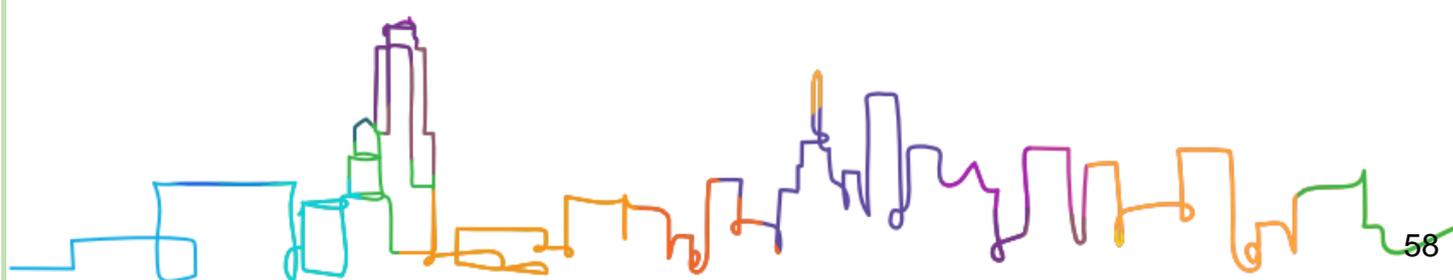
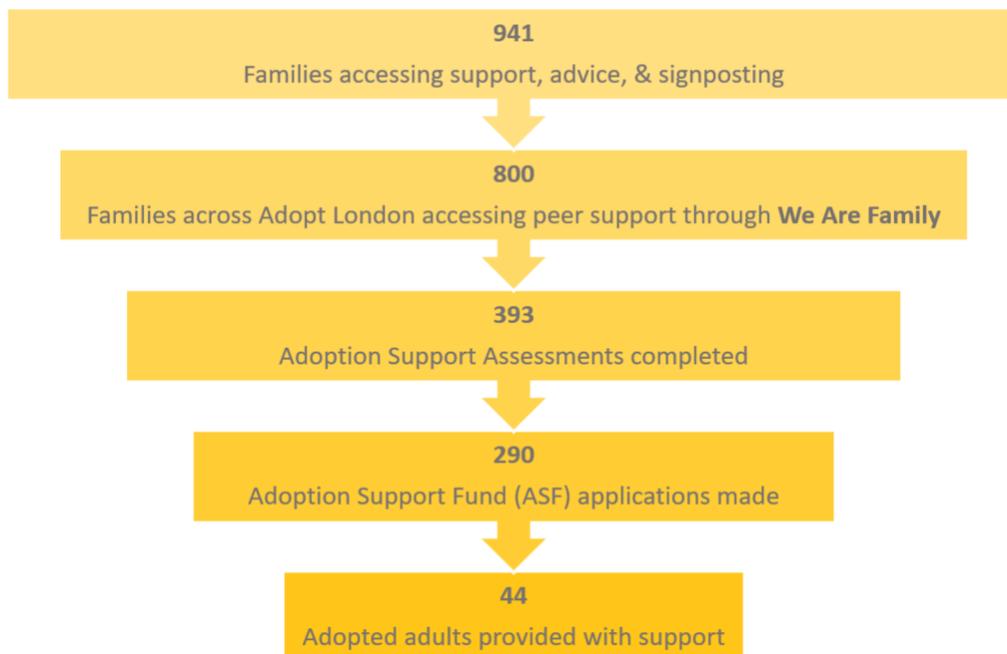


In summer 2020 WAF in partnership with Adopt London launched a regular expert webinar programme for parents ‘WAF Talks’, which offers talks twice a month on a wide variety of topics and access to watch these back through a new members hub. This has provided a lifeline of support for families struggling throughout 2020. Topics covered have been broad, including helping parents whose children are experiencing suicidal thoughts, hearing the perspective of a birth mother, and a research briefing about the importance of contact. Our partnership with WAF continues to grow and in summer 2021 we will be launching a new podcast series together.

“Thank you for putting on these talks. They have always been very helpful and tonight’s was fantastic. Thank the speaker from the bottom of my heart. She has helped to further my education and this will undoubtedly help my children with understanding the past and their birth mother’s journey.”

### 28. Demand for support

In 2020/21 our Adoption Support service delivered this support to our adoptive families and adopted adults in north London:



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2021/22

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### **Finding prospective adoptive parents**

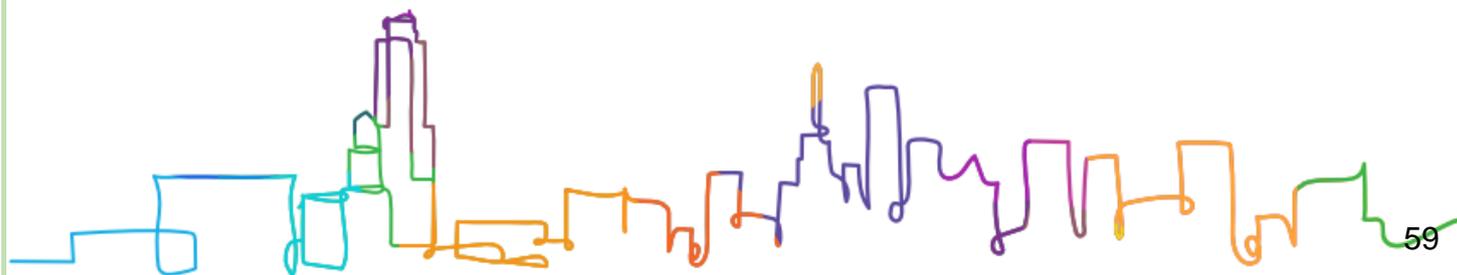
1. Launch and implement phase 1 of our project to better understand the needs of black and black dual ethnicity adopters, and to improve our services to them for the long term.
2. Build the Adopt London reach and reputation on social media.
3. Improve outreach to our local communities through borough communications teams.
4. Increase the rate at which those submitting an Expression of Interest go on to start their assessment.

### **Preparing and approving adoptive parents**

5. Increase the number of approvals whilst maintaining high standard of assessments.
6. Complete the launch of our permanent Adoption Panel.

### **Planning for children**

7. Complete a review of Agency Decision Maker processes in the boroughs to ensure these are robust.
8. Improve early referral rates for all children in care proceedings who may benefit from a plan for adoption so that there is time for careful care planning.
9. Increase awareness of Early Permanence in children's social work teams.



### Placing children with adoptive parents

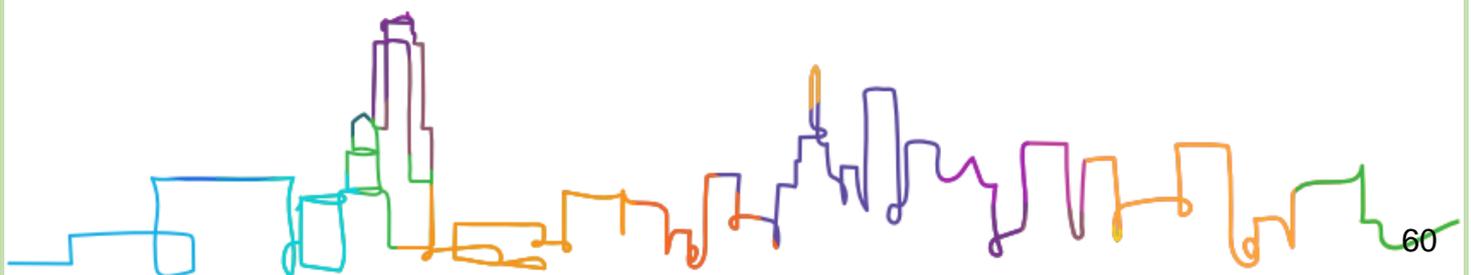
10. Increase the number of children who move to in-house and local adoptive families.
11. Evaluate specific-child publicity work and roll out recommendations.
12. Support implementation of the Moving to Adoption model for transitions by providing training and support to children's social work teams.

### Providing support to adoptive families and others

13. Increase access to support resources for everyone impacted by adoption through development of the Adopt London website.
14. Launch regular drop-in support spaces for those children's social work teams that are working with adopted children and young people, and for social workers who are completing life story work with children placed for adoption.
15. Introduce tools to allow better recording and measuring of adoption support work and to capture feedback from those who have accessed services.

### Working as part of Adopt London

16. Strengthen arrangements through a legal partnership agreement for Adopt London.

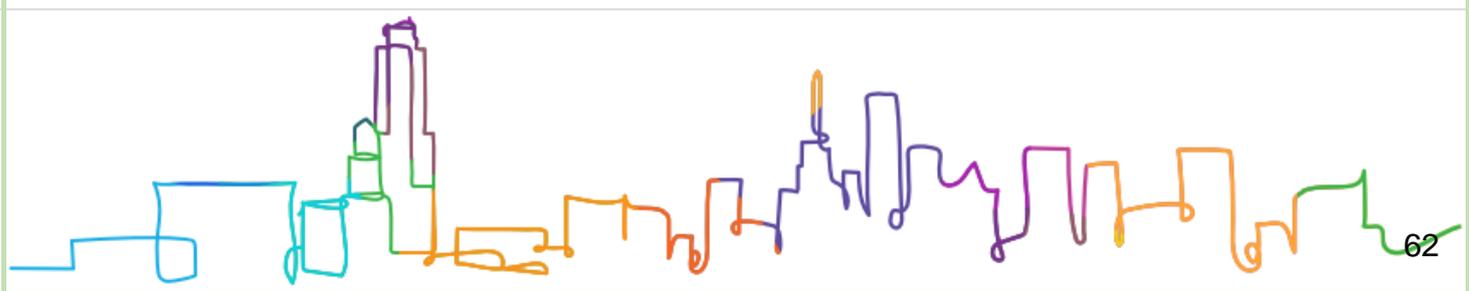
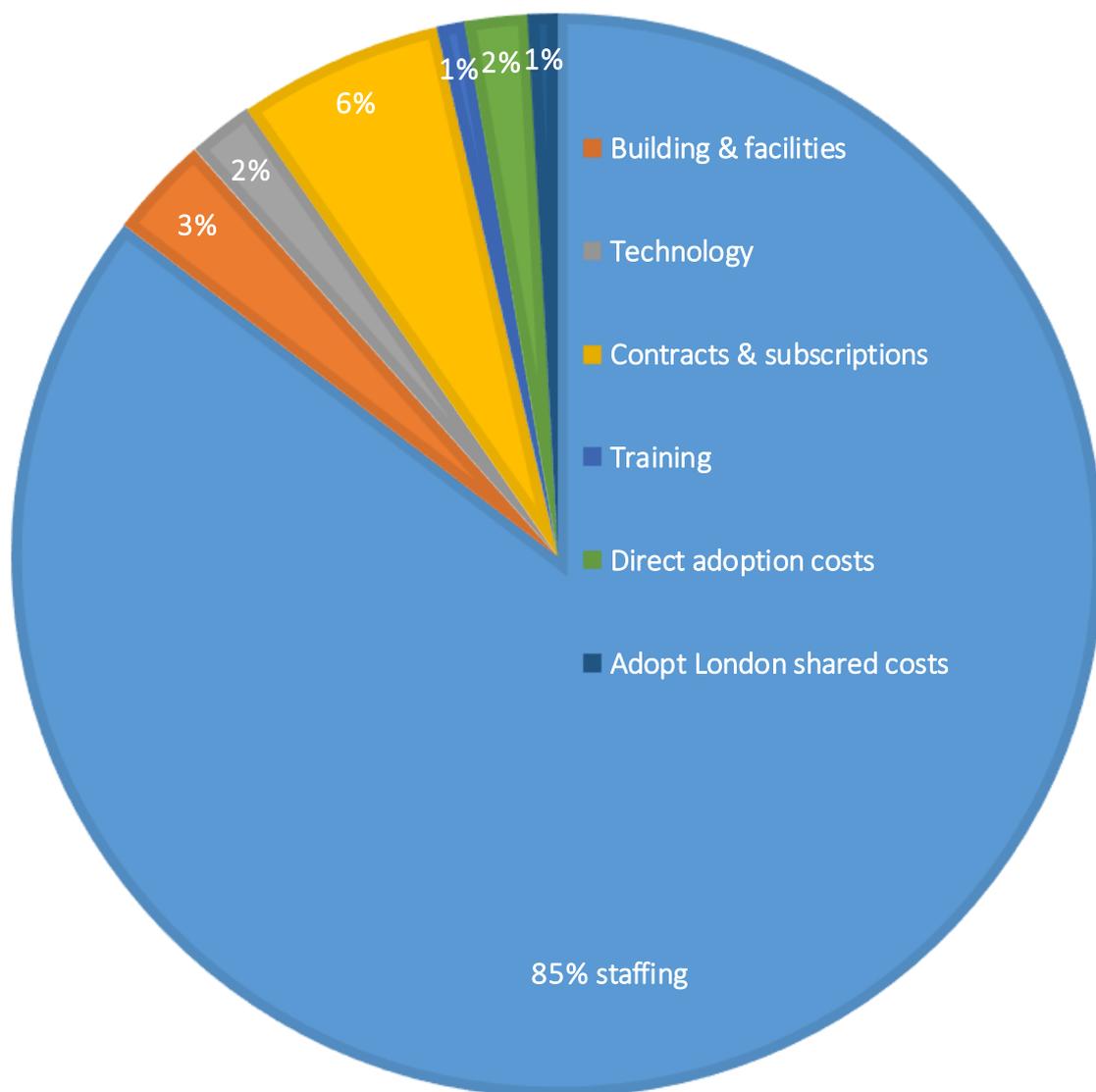




FINANCIAL OUTTURN REPORT 2020/21

The total budget for ALN in 2020/21 was £2,497,062. Of this, 85% (£2,097,155) was spent on staffing costs – including permanent and agency staffing, sessional workers and maternity costs.

AREAS OF SPEND IN 2020/21





# ADOPT LONDON NORTH

REPORT END



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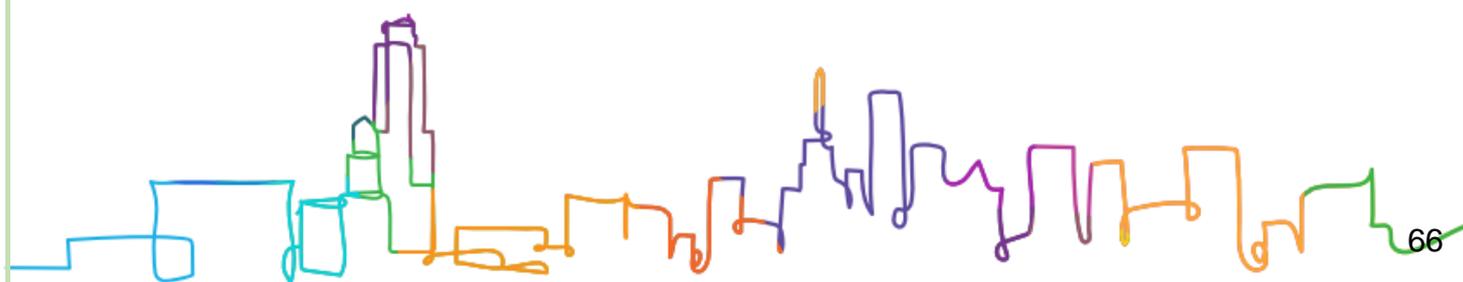
# ANNUAL REPORT

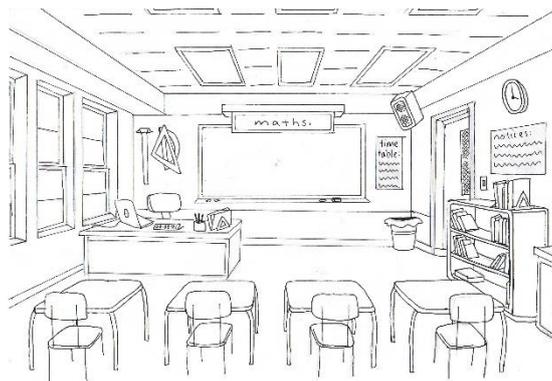
## YOUNG PEOPLE'S SUMMARY

### OCTOBER 2019 – MARCH 2021

- **Who we are:** We are a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) formed in October 2019 to deliver the local authority adoption services for six north London boroughs – Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Hackney, Haringey, and Islington. Islington are the host borough, all ALN staff are employed by Islington. We are funded and governed by all six boroughs through a Governance Board. RAA's have been formed over the whole of England as a result of a change in the law in 2016.
- **What we do:** We support with permanency planning for children, and we find adoptive families for children with an adoption care plan; we find, train, and approve prospective adopters; we provide adoption support services to adoptive families with children of any age, and to adopted adults, and the birth parents of children who have been adopted.
- **About Adopt London:** We work as partners with three other Adopt London RAAs in London – South, East, & West so that people who are considering adopting a child or looking for support can find the information they need in one place. Together we cover 23 of the London boroughs.
- **How we find adoptive parents:** We focus our efforts online through our website, search engine optimisation, and through social media. We want everyone in London who is considering adopting a child to come to one of our information sessions, and we want to encourage people who haven't yet thought about adopting to consider it. Last year our website and social media growth was strong and we want this to keep growing in 2021/22. Our enquiries about adopting represent around a 50% increase on those received prior to Adopt London North (ALN). We run sessions online for people to hear about adoption directly from adoptive parents, and these have been really successful in 2020/21 at deepening people's understanding from an early stage.
- **New adoptive families:** We didn't approve as many new families this year as we had in previous years, partially as a result of the pandemic. We are already seeing strong signs of this being much better in 2021/22, and we hope to return to the levels of approvals seen before services were disrupted by the transition to Adopt London North.

- **More black and black dual ethnicity families are needed:** Around 40-45% of the children we place for adoption are of black or black dual ethnicity. Although over 40% of prospective adopters starting their assessment in 2020/21 had at least one parent of black or black dual ethnicity, because our number of families approved was low this is still not enough families to ensure that we can quickly and appropriately place all of our children with an adoptive family. We are launching a long-term project in 2021/22 to better understand how we need to change in order to achieve this, and to work out a plan to implement those changes.
- **Adoption plans for children:** Fewer children across north London had plans made for adoption in 2020/21 and a large factor in this is delays to final hearings in court proceedings, caused by the pandemic. ALN has a role in supporting the children's social work teams to plan for children and make sure that adoption is being considered wherever appropriate.
- **Finding adoptive families for children:** We use lots of different ways to find families for children with an adoption plan and have pioneered new approaches during the pandemic. We want to try to increase the number of children who move to live with ALN families, and where this is not possible with families who live in London and the surrounding areas. These placements make it easier for us to resolve any problems that come up, and to offer really excellent support. In 2020/21 a third of children went to live with ALN-approved adoptive families.
- **Moving children to new families:** We have introduced a new, research-based model to guide us when planning how to move children into their new families. This recognises the need for a longer planning phase before the main introductions take place, and more supported contact with their foster carers after they first move. In 2021/22 we have more work to do to support the children's social work teams in their understanding of this model.
- **Characteristics of children placed for adoption:** In 2020/21 a third of children were placed for adoption with their sibling, two thirds were individual children. Children were aged from under 1 to 6 years old at the time they went to live with their new family, with 60% of children being under 3 years old. There were 12 different official ethnicity categories recorded for our children.
- **Providing support to adoptive families:** We provide lots of different levels of support, from a duty service through to accessing therapeutic services and longer term social work support. In the first wave of the pandemic we were able to access government funds to deliver around £1million of virtual therapeutic services to adoptive and special guardianship families, which was only possible because we worked together across Adopt London to pool our funds and our resources. We have a partnership with a charity called We Are Family, run by adopters for adopters to provide peer support. During 2020/21 we delivered a webinar programme in partnership with them so that parents could access expert advice and support from home.





**BARNET VIRTUAL  
SCHOOL  
ANNUAL REPORT  
2020-21**



## THE VIRTUAL SCHOOL

The Virtual School is the key educational advocacy service for all children in care (CIC), whether educated in Barnet or placed out of authority. The focus of our statutory duty is to improve educational outcomes through challenging and supporting schools, academies, and specialist settings to ensure that CIC:

- Attend school on a full-time basis
- Receive the best possible opportunities as learners by accessing mainstream education or where appropriate specialist or alternative provisions and through attending school which are judged to be at least good in Ofsted inspections
- Maintain at least expected rates of progress relative to their starting points on becoming looked after
- Close the achievement gap with their peers

The Virtual School acts as a champion for CIC by fulfilling the responsibilities of being a highly ambitious, proactive and effective 'Corporate Parent'. There is a clear emphasis on the need to raise aspirations and improve rates of progress and to close the attainment gap between CIC and their peers.

The Virtual School is not a registered educational provider - it is each school/academy that is directly responsible for improving the rates of progress and educational outcomes of CIC on roll. However, through the effective use of Personal Education Plans (PEPs), the Virtual School holds schools and academies to account in relation to the:

- provision offered
- level of aspirations encouraged
- setting and reviewing of SMART targets
- attendance of young people
- reduction of fixed term exclusions and need to find alternatives to permanent exclusions

The Virtual School team is responsible for ensuring that Pupil Premium Plus for children in care is managed to improve educational outcomes and has primary responsibility for ensuring that there is a suitable education in place for all children in care, this includes overseeing admissions, managed moves and education moves brought about through care placement moves. The Virtual School team works with children at times of placement change, school change and periods of challenge in their lives to ensure that engagement with education is sustained. It also provides advice and information to support children who were previously looked after and are now subject to adoption orders, special guardianship orders and child arrangement orders.

## 1. Key Performance Indicators 2020-2021

<b>KPIs</b>	
Average Progress 8 score of looked-after children in the top 10% when compared to CIC nationally.	There is no Progress 8 information available
Gap between (i) A8 for Barnet CIC and A8 nationally for all pupils and (ii) P8 for Barnet CIC and P8 nationally for all pupils is in the top quartile.	Barnet just above national in the Attainment 8 measure  The rank in Attainment 8 between 2019 and 2020 improved from 99 <sup>th</sup> in 2019 to 74 <sup>th</sup> in 2020.  There is no Progress 8 information available
90% of 0-16 year olds PEPs are good or better	Achieved
75% of 16-17 year olds PEPs are good or better	Achieved
RWM in KS2, at the expected standard, is in the top quartile	N/A
The percentage of 16-17 year olds who are NEET is below 20% by the end of March 2021	10.8%

## 2. School Context (as of 30/7/21)

		<b>2018/ 2019</b>	<b>2019/ 2020</b>	<b>2020/ 2021</b>	
	<b>Nursery</b>		11	12	
	<b>% of children SEN support</b>			2	
	<b>% of children with EHCPs</b>			3	
<b>Statutory age group</b>	<b>Statutory age</b>	191	196	195	
	<b>Reception</b>		4	7	
	<b>Key Stage 1</b>		16	14	
	<b>Key Stage 2</b>		43	37	
	<b>Key Stage 3</b>		51	53	
	<b>Key Stage 4</b>		82	84	
	<b>Boys/girls</b>	111/80	113/83	109/86	
	<b>% of children from ethnic minority groups</b>		70.6%	73.3%	
	<b>% of children SEN support</b>		19.8% (39)	21.5% (42)	
	<b>% of children with EHCPs</b>			24.9% (49)	24.6% (48)
				O/B   I/B	O/B   I/B
				33   16	30   18
	<b>Number of UASC</b>	18	25	35	
	<b>Children without a school place</b>		0	2	

<b>Post 16 age group</b>	<b>Post 16</b>	157	135	152		
	<b>Male/female</b>	113/44	96/39	113/39		
	<b>% of children from ethnic minority groups</b>		78.5%	79.6%		
	<b>% of children with EHCPs</b>		14%(19)		13.8%(21)	
			O/B	I/B	O/B	I/B
			11	3	16	5
	<b>Number of UASC</b>	39	67	76		
	<b>NEET Year 12</b>		11	19		
	<b>NEET Year 13</b>		14	14		
<b>NEET 16/17 year olds</b>			20			

### 3. COVID-19

Over the last year, we have continued to adapt our working practices in the light of the pandemic and the changing impact on education and young people.

The impact on young people has been significant and has affected people in different ways. However, the team have continued to support the education of Barnet LAC effectively over the period and we have seen an increase in attendance across the year. All our statutory aged children were offered places in school in the Spring Term 2021 and the take up was better than in the Summer Term 2020. Attendance has increased across the Summer Term 2021 (see attendance section). For those who did not attend in person in the Spring Term, engagement with online learning was variable with some finding it easy to adapt to and others really struggling to keep motivated. With our post 16 cohort, the majority who are in education had to learn remotely which was challenging for many and they have welcomed the return to in person teaching.

Over the year, the Virtual School has continued to support young people's well-being, engagement, and achievement in a number of different ways. These include:

- Provision of laptops to enable remote learning (e.g. since September 2021 over 93 have been given to young people). Interpreters have been used on occasions to support young people with laptop set up
- Tuition provided to all students in April 2020 for a fixed period to support whilst schools set up remote learning
- Home learning ideas given to foster carers and was a focus in PEPs
- Guides to support children with understanding coronavirus and return to school distributed
- Virtual School webpages populated with links to weblinks to support learning and well being
- Range of enrichment opportunities still provided (see on) and foster carers and young people encouraged to participate
- Schools encouraged to be imaginative in PPG+ funding requests e.g. increase in musical instruments and take up of 'hobbies' to promote practical life skills
- Increase in contact with young people through calls, WhatsApp etc.
- Increased support for young people in applying for 6<sup>th</sup> form/colleges
- Close contact maintained with foster carers during lockdown
- Year 6/7 transition lead supported foster carers with creative approach using websites to see virtual tours, uniform, staff etc and provision of profile passports during first lockdown
- Training sessions continued to be offered to carers and D.T.s
- Termly newsletter sent to foster carers and twice termly to D.T.s

- Flexible approach to PEPs across the year including COVID PEP in Summer Term 2020. Caseworkers took the lead on PEPs in the Summer Term 2020. The full PEP was implemented across the academic year for statutory age children
- Increase in attendance at PEPs by caseworkers
- Ensuring focus on engagement in learning and well-being in PEPs
- Well-being ideas given to foster carers
- Close monitoring of attendance

Much of the information usually reported on is still simply not available e.g. end of year outcomes, attendance, so the reported data on outcomes is limited.

#### 4. Attendance (statutory age children)

Absence over time – children in care for more than 12 months (Local authority interactive tool - LAIT)

% absence from school of children who have been looked after continuously for at least 12 months												
Local Authority, Region and England		2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Change from previous year
302	Barnet	6.70	7.80	5.20	6.30	6.80	6.40	4.00	5.50	3.40	6.40	3.00
988	Outer London	-	-	-	4.30	4.20	4.20	4.10	4.50	4.60	4.40	-0.20
	Statistical Neighbours	5.71	4.86	4.48	3.95	3.74	3.83	3.75	3.93	4.10	4.20	0.10
970	England	5.80	5.50	4.70	4.40	3.90	4.00	3.90	4.30	4.50	4.70	0.20

Persistent absence over time (attendance less than 90%) Local authority interactive tool - LAIT)

% of children looked after who are classed as persistent absentees												
Local Authority, Region and England		2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Change from previous year
302	Barnet	-	-	-	11.30	18.30	18.00	6.70	10.60	7.40	10.50	3.10
988	Outer London	-	-	-	10.50	9.60	10.30	10.00	11.70	11.20	10.00	-1.20
	Statistical Neighbours	-	-	-	11.30	8.37	9.40	11.60	11.18	11.66	10.36	-1.30
970	England	-	-	-	10.10	8.90	9.00	9.10	10.00	10.60	10.90	0.30

#### Official Data Release for Children Looked After (CLA) 2019/20

Due to the pandemic and the associate issues in accurately recording and publishing attendance data in 2019/20 academic year the DfE only published Autumn term attendance. The data below is not directly comparable with previous attendance publications.

	Number of Pupils	Attendance Rate	Rank	Authorised Absence	Rank	Unauthorised Absence Rate	Rank	PA	Rank
Barnet	98	93.2%	125	3.7%	72	3.1%	136	14.3	102
England	34450	94.5%		3.8%		1.7%		12.5	
London	3520	94.1%		3.7%		2.2%		13.2	

- In the Autumn Term 2019, Barnet's attendance rate was lower than all comparators.
- The rank for this measure is in the lowest quartile.
- Barnet's authorised Absence rate is in line with the National and London Averages.
- Barnet's unauthorised absence rate is nearly twice the rate of the national average and the ranking is also very low.
- The small pupil numbers in this cohort can cause greater variation, especially when compared with National and London averages.

Further investigation of Barnet's attendance figures shows has revealed an explanation of these figures.

Welfare Call monitor the attendance of 26,000 children in care and comparison with this larger group shows the impact of having a large Y11 cohort - 15.6% of the group monitored by Welfare Call are in Y11. In Barnet it is 24.44%.

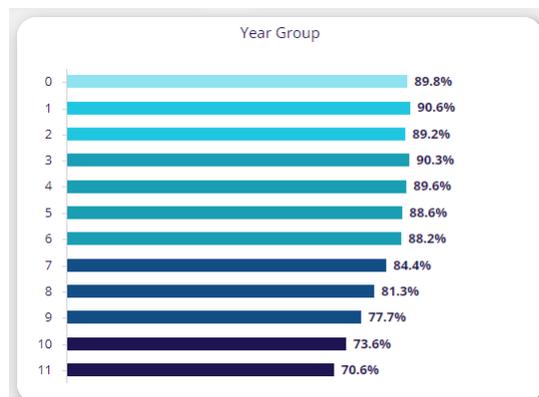
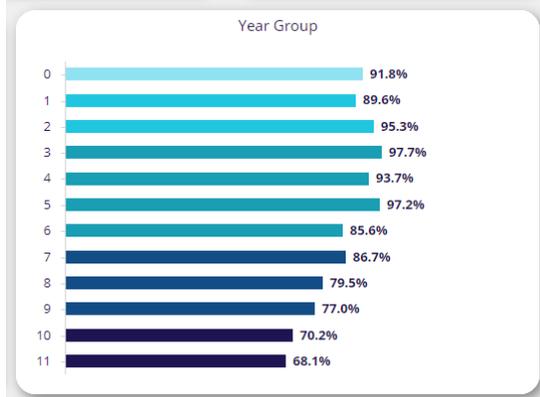
Barnet's figures are very similar to the national average, but with Barnet pupils having significantly higher attendance in most KS1 & KS2 year groups. Barnet's Y11s attendance is slightly below the average, and because Barnet has a large proportion of Y11s (almost a quarter of the cohort, 10% higher than the national average) the lower attendance in that age group has a much more significant affect in lowering the Barnet attendance as a whole than it does nationally.

- For Year Groups Reception to Y10, the national attendance is 83.83% an increase of 2% compared to when Y11s are included. For Barnet, removing the Y11s results in an attendance figure of 83.3% gives an increase of 3.5%
- Attendance for Reception to Y6 is 93.01% compared with a national figure of 89.32%. However, this only contributes 30% of Barnet pupils. Nationally it is 40%. Not only are Y11s lowering Barnet's overall attendance more significantly than nationally, it would appear the relatively low numbers in primary school are not able to boost the attendance figures in the same way as occurs nationally.

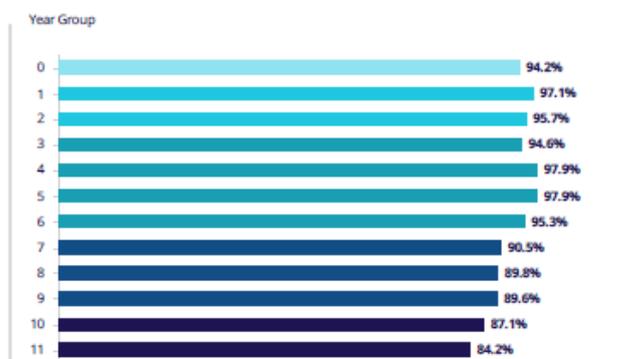
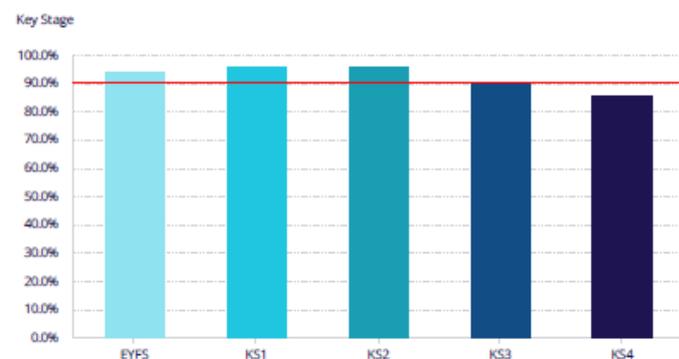
W/E 7<sup>th</sup> May

**Barnet Virtual School**

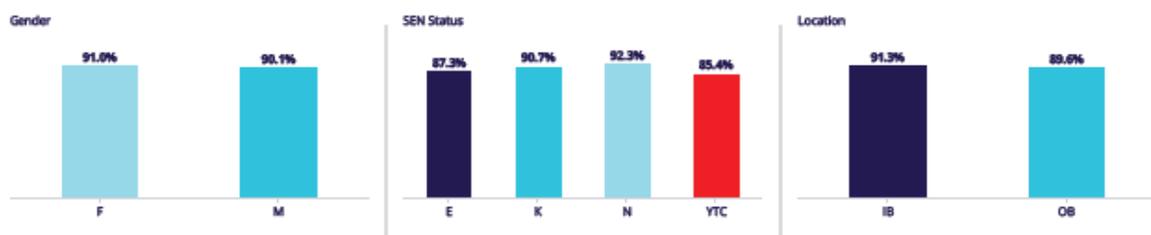
**Welfare Call wider group (26,000)**



Current attendance



Attendance since the return to school in April is strongest amongst primary age children, with a clear drop off in Y11. It is this cohort who have struggled most with the return to school. Across the whole cohort, there has been little variation between gender, SEN status or location. There was however been an increase in attendance across the half term and into the beginning of June (currently 93.3%) which dropped slightly into July (90.51%)



Attendance Comparison - 2019-20 and Autumn Term 2020-21 (taken from Welfare Call)

	Autumn 19 /Spring 20	Summer 20 (schools limited opening)	Autumn 20	Spring 2021 (schools limited opening)	Summer 2021
Numbers (all)	177	186	165	177	192
Attendance (all)	87.9%	44.2%	92%	64.45% (Spring) 79% (Aut/Spring)	90.51%
Number with 100% (all)	27	31	56	20 (Aut/Spring)	46 (23.6%)
Number of eligible children (in care for 12 months plus)	116	116	115	129	128
Attendance (in care 12 months plus)	93.4%	54.4%	91.9%	63.7% (Spring) 79.3% (Aut/Spring)	91.4%

Persistent Absence (below 90%)

Across the year, it is hard to draw meaningful conclusions about persistent absence figures as have been extraordinary. Looking just at the Summer Term does not give meaningful information as to children at PA status as the time scale is too small.

Attendance remains a key priority and the Virtual School continues to implement the actions started in the Autumn Term.

- Analysis of absence reports in Welfare Call to ensure accuracy
- Contextual attendance information included in PEPs – we have slightly altered the PEP format so that attendance is a priority and targets are being set if it is a cause for concern
- Ensure caseworkers are getting weekly reports of attendance for their caseload
- Introduce half termly attendance monitoring meeting to track attendance and identify pupils who are persistently absent and or whose attendance is dropping off

## 5. Exclusions

	Number of fixed-term exclusions						Number of permanent exclusions			
	Autumn 2019	Spring 2020	Summer 2020	Autumn 2020	Spring 2021	Summer 2021	2019/2020	Autumn 2020	Spring 2021	Summer 2021
No of pupils	10	7	1	7	4	7	0	0	0	0
No of exclusions	14	15	1	7	4	14	0	0	0	0
No of days excluded	36	42.5	1	17.5	15.5	56	0	0	0	0
No of exclusions with day 1 provision	13	14	0	7	3	14	0	0	0	0

	In Borough								
	Fixed-period exclusions				Permanent exclusions				
	2019/2020	Autumn 2020	Spring 2021	Summer 2021	2019/2020	Autumn 2020	Spring 2021	Summer 2021	
Total number of pupils excluded	7	3	2	3	0	0	0	0	
Total number of days lost	34	8.5	10	40	0	0	0	0	
	Out of Borough								
	Total number of pupils excluded	11	4	2	4	0	0	0	0
	Total number of days lost	45.5	9	5.5	16	0	0	0	0

N.B In the academic year 2019-20, Barnet had a lower rate of fixed term exclusions for children looked after continuously for at least 12 months than the same group nationally (10.34% compared with 11.38%)

Of the children who received a fixed term exclusion, the majority of children were boys in secondary provisions - one child was in primary. Four girls had exclusions compared with 11 boys and the highest ethnic group to receive exclusions was White British but they are also the largest group in the Virtual School. Typical reasons for exclusions continue to be:

- Physical assault on an adult or child
- Verbal abuse
- Threatening behaviour
- Bringing in banned items
- Not following instructions

Exclusions enforced without clear reason are challenged by the Virtual School and schools are expected to provide alternative education from the first day of the exclusion, whether this be a placement at an alternative school or tutoring. As part of the Virtual School strategy this is communicated to schools as soon as we are made aware of an intention to exclude or an exclusion. We work with schools to look at alternatives to exclusions and support with putting in place preventative measures.

## 6. School Places

Number of children currently without a school place: 2

Number of directions for a school place: 0

Changes in circumstances – Summer Term 2021 (brackets Summer Term 2020)

No. of pupils:	Same School Place	Change in school place
Same placement	165 (169)	2 (7)
Change in placement	16 (9)	7 (5)

Looking at the Summer Term, there were a number of young people who changed placement and schools. These were due to a number of reasons including:

- Moving placements so needed to change schools
- Moving back to live with a parent from an out of borough specialist placement
- Moving to a new residential home with education on site
- Under a section in a mental health acute unit

Educational Provision – Ofsted Judgements

	Total	No in good /outstanding schools	No in requires improvement /inadequate school	Unknown	Reason for placements in requires improvement /inadequate school
<b>In Borough school</b>	99	90	5	4 Schools not yet inspected	Children already attending prior to coming into care
<b>Out of Borough school</b>	81	64	5	12 Schools not yet inspected or academy convertors One school in Scotland.	Foster carer choice x 2 Already attending before RI grading x 2 Older sibling already attending.

## 7. Personal Education Plans (PEPs)

The Personal Education Plan (PEP) for each child includes progress and attainment information as well as recording interventions, often funded through the Pupil Premium Plus Grant, to ensure the child achieves well. The Virtual School works in partnership with teams in Children and Families and with Designated Teachers in schools, to ensure that each child has an up to date, effective and high-quality PEP that focuses on education outcomes.

### Summer Term 2021

Information provided as of the 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2021.

	Total Number of PEPs	Number of PEPs completed within statutory time frames	Number of incomplete PEPs/not uploaded.	Number and % rag rated green	Number and % rag rated amber	Number and % rag rated red
<b>Early Years</b>	12	12	0	11 91.6%	0	1 8.3%
<b>Statutory</b>	189	187	0	186 98.9%	3 1.58%	0
<b>Post 16</b>	151	151	0	149 98.6%	2 1.32%	0

The Early Years PEP was rag rated red as the D.T. did not complete their section, despite requests to do so. Amber ratings were due to social workers not completing the carer section or pupil voice section not being completed.

	Total Number of PEPs	Number of PEPs completed within statutory time frames	Number of incomplete PEPs/not uploaded.	Number and % rag rated green	Number and % rag rated amber	Number and % rag rated red
<b>Statutory</b>	539	536	3	494 91.65%	42 7.79%	3 0.55 %
<b>Post 16</b>	436	436	0	414 94.95%	22 5.04%	0

Over the whole year, 91.65% of statutory PEPs rag-rated as green. The ones rag-rated red were due to D.T.s not completing the PEP.

## 8. Achievement

We are unable to report fully on achievement from 2019/20 due to COVID-19. However there has been an official data release for KS4, although limited in its scope.

It is incomplete due to low pupil numbers meaning some measures for Barnet are redacted. Despite this, below is a breakdown of the Barnet figures compared to National and London Averages, the 'results' are not directly comparable to 2019. The data included in the sections relating to Children Looked After for 12 months or more in 31 March 2020.

## CLA – KS4 2020

	Number of pupils	Attainment 8	Rank 2019	Rank 2020	English and Maths 4+	Rank 2019	Rank 2020
Barnet	29	21.8	99	74	24.10%	N/A	65
National Average	6050	21.4			24.40%		
London	900	22.3			26.70%		

- Barnet is roughly in line with the national average (narrowly above in the Attainment 8 measure and narrowly below on the proportion of pupils attaining a four or above in English and Maths).
- The rank in Attainment 8 between 2019 and 2020 improved from 99<sup>th</sup> in 2019 to 74<sup>th</sup> in 2020.

### Current achievement

Looking at responses to questions in the PEPs, of those who answered, 80% of young people were reported to be making good or better progress and 75% were reported to be at least engaged and motivated most of the time. The highest responses came from our primary cohort with attitude to learning being less positive in Key Stage 4 and progress slower.

### **9. Planned Destinations – Year 11**

Destination	Number
College– A levels	4
College- vocational course	13
College – other course	16
Staying on at school – A levels	3
Staying on at school – special school	5
Changing to another school – A levels	3
Apprenticeship	0
Working	0
Other - please specify	Staying on at school other course – 1 Joining a new specialist provision - 1
NEET	5

## 10. Post 16 Cohort

### Engagement with education, employment and training

	In Borough	Out of Borough
Apprenticeship	1	0
Working	2	2
College/6th Form/SEN Provision	20	82
Engaged in a short course	2	2
NEET due to being new to care UASC	3	4
NEET - other	7	16
In secure unit	0	3

### **Young people who are NEET**

At Post-16 the young people not in education, employment or training present a significant challenge and engaging them is no easy task. The category includes those in psychiatric units, pregnant or who frequently go missing thus are even harder to engage in education or training.

In 2020, 39% of care leavers were NEET nationally. Currently, we have 22.9% of our Year 12 and 13's who are NEET. However, 4.8% of these are unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people who are relatively new into care.

### Action undertaken

Supporting young people who are NEET is a key area and caseworkers work closely with them to support reengagement into education, employment, or training. The BEETs team support with connections within various industries whereby companies head hunt young people who are searching for either a work placement or apprenticeship. Construction and motor vehicle apprenticeship/placement have been of interest to young people. Two companies - North London Garages and Galdris Construction - have considered a few of our young people in the Summer term as potential candidates. One young person has successfully secured and started his apprenticeship with Galdris and is thoroughly enjoying it.

Two different mentoring programmes developed by the BEETs team have also proved very effective in engaging young people. The first is the Bridging the Gap programme where young people can gain a qualification in employability skills, money management and a refresher in basic English and Maths. There is a monetary incentive of £150-200 upon successful completion of the course. The programme helps prepare young people for further education, training or employment. All young people are assigned to a mentor on a 1:1 basis who support them in planning their next steps in the world of work or education including help with finding opportunities and submitting applications.

The second is the RON Project which is more focused around mentoring and coaching. It is dynamic, personalised, asset driven, and strengths based. Sessions with young people are tailored around boosting their self-esteem, helping them to vision their purpose in life,

strengthening the power of their mindset, developing emotional intelligence, and planning their goals and how to achieve them. Many of our young people face various challenges and low morale so the RON Project aims to work with individuals tailoring a programme of intervention relevant to them and their journey to help overcome certain barriers.

#### Action undertaken

1-1 work providing advice and guidance regarding action planning for the future.  
 Support for young people who are NEET regarding applications for courses.  
 Course ideas/opportunities provided on a regular basis to professional network.  
 Follow up on progress on a regular basis (weekly or fortnightly).  
 Continue to build relationships and trust through meetings and telephone contact.  
 Support young people with interviews/visits when possible.  
 Maintain regular communication with professional networks so as not to duplicate actions.  
 Refer to BEETs if young person is not engaging  
 Liaise with placement to support young people

#### Planned Destinations for Year 13 September 2021

<b>Destination</b>	<b>Number</b>
Higher Education - university	4
College	35
Staying on at school	1
Educated at home	
Illness	
Pregnancy	
Specialist provision	
Re-engagement provision	
Work training programme	1
Apprenticeship	
Working	5
Other - please specify	Two in prison Two looking for employment One engaging in short course/looking for employment
NEET	14
Unknown – please comment	2

#### Higher Education

We were delighted that in 2019, we had 4 young people who went onto university. Young carer leavers from Barnet went to:  
 Liverpool John Moore - Criminology  
 Brunel - Business Marketing Management  
 King's College - Computer Science  
 Middlesex - Law

### **11. Staffing**

The Virtual School got approval to appoint a School Business Manager who is now in place and taking over a lot of the administrative and finance tasks. One caseworker left at the end of the summer to work for a family member and has been replaced.

a. Current Staffing

<b>Staff member's name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Additional comments</b>
Paul Whitcombe	Executive Head Teacher	1 day a week
Sarah Deale	Headteacher	
Julie Locke	Senior Case worker	KS3/4 and senior role
Jane Thrift	School Business Manager	
Maria Skoutaridou	PEP Coordinator with additional responsibilities	Reducing to 2 days from September
Allan Newby	Caseworker	EYFS/Primary
Hannah Hudson	Caseworker	KS2/3
Ornella Rochfort	Caseworker	KS4
Frasier Stroud	Caseworker	Post 16
Aiysha Iqbal	Caseworker	Post 16
Amy Wight	Senior Learning Mentor	Transition Hub
Nathanael Ribas	Admin	Transition Hub - 3 days
Daniel Matsuzaka	Outreach Learning Mentor	Transition Hub
Samuel Okine	Outreach Learning Mentor	Transition Hub

b. Professional Development

Training attended during the year included

- Pathways activity to identify strengths and areas for development for the school Part 2 led by Amy Gibb and Parminder Chana .
- Race and Identity in LAC (DT training attended by team)
- Race and Identity follow up (team only)
- Fragile Fearful and Fragmented – Barry Carpenter
- Emotional based school non-attendance
- Advanced Designated Safeguarding Lead training
- National Association for Virtual School Heads webinars
- Welfare Call training on monitoring attendance and use an Analytics
- Prevent training
- Thriving not Surviving – Adopt London North

- The Transition Hub staff continue to receive regular training from Professor Catherine Carroll (St Mary's University) and the Barnet Educational Psychologist attached to the Hub (Amy Gibb)
- Race and Identity follow up
- National Association for Virtual School Heads conference (as it was held virtually, all team members could attend)
- Power of Language – Dr Karen Treisman
- Introduction to the Rights and Entitlements of Care experienced young people
- Preparation for Ofsted - Become
- Welfare call training
- Pathways activity to identify strengths and areas for development for the school Part 3 led by Amy Gibb and Parminder Chana .

Visits to team meetings from Charles Rice Jasmine West, Linda Orr (SEND), Juliette Thomson EP (Exclusions and LAC) and Joanne Kelly (PRU)

The whole Virtual School team has had training on Gateway. We have also bought into training units from AC Education and have allocated each team member 3 units so they can choose which they are interested in doing.

### c. Supervision

Caseworkers had 1:1 supervision with the senior caseworker monthly.

A group supervision is carried out to support more difficult cases and share expertise. This is supported by the Educational Psychology Team who also carry out supervision for the senior members of the team.

## **12. Engagement with Stakeholders**

### **a. Children**

#### Enrichment Activities

<b>Term</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Age group</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Outline</b>
Ongoing	A New Direction – ongoing 1-year project	13-17 years old	4	Arts enrichment programme for young people in care co-designed with Care Leavers, addressing issues and topics they feel are pertinent to them. Young people who are participating are building a community through a creative platform, supporting each other during transition phases, raising public awareness of this process, learning about their rights and having their voices heard.
Autumn Term	Strength in Horses	Year 7 - Year 12	1	Strength and Learning Through Horses' provides an alternative experience for young people who sometimes find it difficult to engage in traditional therapy and classroom settings but thrive in the inclusive outdoor setting of the stables. The expert team of Clinic Psychologists, Psychotherapists and Horse Behaviour Experts work with young people helping them to translate the horse's behaviour into observations which are meaningful for the young person. The outcomes to be achieved includes: (i) Engagement with the therapeutic process (ii) Confidence building, assertiveness and increased self-awareness (iii) Relational difficulties including building effective communication and trust (iv) Problem solving, team work and developing more helpful interactions with others (v) Specific skills development including supporting engagement in education and work settings (e.g. listening, persistence, and patience).

Autumn Term	Phoenix Outdoor Centre	Years 5-8	4	This took place at the Phoenix Outdoor Centre is situated on the Welsh Harp Reservoir and provided some great outdoor activities for our young people. The aim of the day was to have great fun in a safe outdoor environment, including <u>Orienteering</u> and <u>Kayaking</u>
Autumn Term and ongoing	Shaftesbury Project (Harrow School)	GCSE	4	The Harrow School Shaftesbury Enterprise and Virtual Schools 1:1 and small group tuition and mentoring is a programme devised by the Director of Shaftesbury Enterprise. Barnet Virtual School joined the programme in Autumn 2020. The programme currently delivers 1:1 subject specific GCSE online tuition and/or mentoring to Children Looked After Each session runs for approximately 40 to 60 minutes at a time.
Autumn Term – cancelled (only 1 session took place)	Celebrate Me	Year 10 girls	2	In partnership with Brunel University, young people took part in a 6 week programme all about empowering young women. The aim was to learn how to identify the confidence they already have, acquire tips and techniques to overcome nerves and self-doubt and reinforce a good self-image, all whilst making friends with our likeminded young women. However, it did not work well as a virtual activity and was stopped
Autumn Term	We are Heroes	Years 3-6	30	‘Storytime’ are a social enterprise and one of the biggest magazines for schools in the UK. They’ve been working hard this year on a new project - the ‘We Are Heroes’ mini magazine, funded by the British Academy. We Are Heroes is a collaboration between Storytime and Queen Mary University of London. It contains carefully chosen myths and legends that have parallels to experiences of lockdown that children could be facing - such as staying at home or protecting yourself, with extra activities produced in consultation with a children’s mental health expert. There will be six editions in total from October through to March. It aims to give children a creative way of processing the situation they find themselves in.
Autumn and ongoing	Letterbox	Years 1/3/5	22/30	The Booktrust runs The Letterbox club which aims to provide children with parcels full of high-quality books and resources, to help encourage reading and learning. Letterbox Club can help looked-after students to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build their confidence in reading, maths and their self-esteem</li> <li>• Feel remembered, valued and excited about receiving their parcels</li> <li>• Spend time with their carers/families and peers to share stories and play games</li> <li>• Have continuity through receiving their parcels despite any placement moves</li> </ul> Each child registered will receive six parcels, with a total of up to 14 fiction and non-fiction books, 10 maths games, around 40 items of stationery and other resources. Feedback from carers has been positive –  <i>‘All three children are enjoying the contents and look forward to receiving the next box. On behalf of the children, thank you all once again for such a brilliant scheme, it couldn’t come at a better time’.</i>
Autumn/ Spring	What Works for Children in Social Care Letter Project	Years 12/13	FE – 52 HE – 17	This is part of a research project which aims to increase the number of young people leaving care going onto higher and further education. What Works for Children’s Social Care (WWCSC), the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO), Become and the National Association of Virtual School Heads (NAVSHs) are seeking to increase the number of young care leavers in HE and further education (FE), building on research carried out by the Behavioural Insights Team. This found that sending a personalised “nudge” letter to students from someone they could identify with, was effective at raising the number who apply to, and accept offers from, selective universities. Letters are written by care experienced young people in HE and FE will be sent to young people in year 12 and 13 (or equivalent) who are currently in care. The letters will encourage young people to think about applying to

				HE/FE, setting out the support available (financial and other) to young care leavers and signposting to Become's Propel website and free advice line. Two letters are to be sent out in November 2020 - one from a young care leaver in HE and one from a young care leaver in FE - and two to be sent out in March 2021 - again one from someone in HE and one from someone in FE.
Autumn	Post 16 Pathways	Years 12/13	5	Post 16 Pathways Presentation by Middlesex University. This was a virtual presentation aimed at getting young people to think about options. Now that we have a link person at Middlesex, we are hoping to be able to offer more sessions
Spring Term	Debate Mate	Years 9-13	6	A series of virtual sessions, young people had the opportunity to practice lots of different elements to debating – thinking on their feet, structuring an argument and backing up their argument, whilst developing their public speaking skills and learning to articulate their views clearly. This is done in a very engaging, fun way using topics that are relevant to them. Young people then practice these skills with a final 'debate challenge' and all young people were given a certificate for participating in the programme.
Spring – Summer Term	Book Club	Year 3-8	8	Designed and led by Virtual Schools, this is a virtual book club which takes place once per month. Children are sent a book each month ahead of the meeting. The aim of this book club is to foster a love of reading, so sessions are kept fun and informative to boost enjoyment and comprehension.
Spring Term and Ongoing	Shaftesbury Project (Orley Farm)	Year 6	4	The Harrow School Shaftesbury Enterprise and Virtual Schools 1:1 and reading/maths tuition and mentoring is a programme devised by the Director of Shaftesbury Enterprise. Barnet Virtual School joined the programme in Spring 2021. The programme currently delivers 1:1 subject specific KS2 online tuition and/or mentoring to Children Looked After Each session runs for approximately 40 to 60 minutes at a time.
Spring/ Summer Term	Philosophy Club	Years 5/6	5	Critical Thinking Skills for Y3 to Y6 – the chance to converse and discuss lots of different ideas. In the sessions, the young people are presented with an idea or other stimulus such as a story or poem or short film and are then asked questions to engage them in conversation with each other.
Spring Term	MyBnk	Years 12/13	2	Virtual event 'Money Works' hosted by MyBnk. The programme is aimed at Post-16 LACs to promote a better understanding of money management, bank accounts, credit cards etc. as they begin their journey into semi-independent/independent living. The programme covers digital aspects of money management, delivered via Zoom. In order to receive the qualification, young people are required to complete and submit a work booklet. Young people will receive an e-certificate as accreditation if they pass the programme.
Spring Term and Ongoing	Brunel Mentoring	Years 12/13	5	In partnership with Brunel University, young people take part in a 10 week Mentoring Programme, delivered by Care Leaver "Ambassadors" – all have DBS and safeguarding training. Over the 10 weeks, the mentor and mentee cover such topics as finding work, looking at different university courses, Propel website etc. The programme also works well with UASC, as a number of the mentors are UASC themselves and can answer more specific questions about things that concern them. Mentors and mentees can also be matched by language.
Spring Term	Big House Project	Years 12/13	1	Big House runs theatre-based workshops for YP aged 16+ who are care experienced or at risk, including NEET, at risk of offending etc. They offer a 12-week programme: 4 weeks life skills which includes budgeting, nutrition, healthy living etc., 4 weeks rehearsal for putting on a play and 4 weeks of shows of their play. There is a whole host of different skills the YP could develop: acting, writing, stage craft – lighting, scenery, costume, etc., filming and editing, producing and directing – such as movement director, assistant producer etc. During the 12 weeks they will be mentored, and at the end of the 12 weeks, given support in their chosen pathway.
Summer 1	Campfire Project	Year 5-8	8	Working with the Barnet based charity, 'Live Unlimited', the campfire project took place every Saturday for 6 weeks at a local venue. Delivered by Forest School-trained practitioners from the charity Wild About Our Woods, young people learnt to build fires, put up a shelter, carve a spoon and cook on an

				open fire. The desired outcomes from this activity included: Improved health and wellbeing, feeling happier, learning new skills, feeling more confident, making new friends, taking risks and trying something different.
Summer 2	Phoenix Outdoor Centre	Years 5-8 Years 9-11 Year 6	1	Re-booking due to cancellation back in October as a result of Covid safety. This took place at the Phoenix Outdoor Centre situated on the Welsh Harp Reservoir and provided some great outdoor activities for our young people. The aim of the day was to have great fun in a safe outdoor environment, including <u>Orienteering</u> and <u>Kayaking</u> .
Summer 2	Arvon	Year 11	3	Barnet Virtual School took 3 Year 11 students for a fun week away following all of their hard work. This trip is designed for students who enjoy writing and like being creative, and would be inspired by exploring beautiful scenery, watching special guest performances, taking country walks and playing fun games. This project aims to build life and independence skills at an old Millhouse which used to belong to the famous English poet, Ted Hughes, in West Yorkshire from Monday 19 <sup>th</sup> July – Friday 23 <sup>rd</sup> July 2021. The course is run by Arvon - <a href="http://www.arvon.co.uk">www.arvon.co.uk</a>
Summer 2	Strength in Horses	Years 7-11	2	As above
Summer 2	Regent's Park Open Air Theatre	Year 11 REC-Y2	15 15	Family days out at Regent's Park Open Air Theatre. For Year 11s, the production is 'Romeo & Juliet', a play which many of our young people have studied. For the young children from Reception – Year 2, the show is called 'Dragons & Mythical Beasts'.
Summer 2	Orley Farm	Year 3/4	4	Orley Farm School hosted an activity day for Years 3 & 4 Looked After Children across 4 Virtual Schools including Barnet Virtual School. There were a carousel of activities such as 'capture the flag', 'rounders', 'mini sports race' and 'scavenger hunt', with some kind of bouncy slide for everyone at the end. A pizza lunch was also included!
Summer 2	ESOL Summer Camp	Years 9-12	15	Barnet Virtual School with Winchmore Tutors hosted a week long Summer Camp to support Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children with developing their English Language skills. The camp took place in Woodhouse College. The focus was academic mornings (English Pre-Entry/Entry Level 1) and afternoon activities (examples: team sports, cooking, trip to local café, University tour, Wall Climbing).
Summer 2	Opera Holland Park Singing	Years 3-9	2	Singing Classes for Y3-Y9 - a series of singing sessions, where participants learnt singing techniques from professional opera singers, enjoyed some live music and singing with a pianist, and learnt the music and story of Janacek's opera The Cunning Little Vixen. The participants will be invited to Opera Holland Park once reopened in the summer to have some live workshops in the park, and to finally watch the production of Cunning Little Vixen. Each session was led by a singer with a background in education and choir leading.

### Stepladder Project

This is a tailor-made incentivised learning programme for 15-17 year olds who have been in care for at least one year (with Child Trust Fund). Online modules covering Literacy, numeracy, financial capability, future planning and employment are completed, resulting in a monetary contribution to their savings account, which they can access when they turn 18.

At the end of the Summer Term there were 35 young people successfully registered and there have been 5 full completions of the programme to date since August 2019. So far the total amount paid out in incentive payments is £17,800. There are 15 active learners of the 35 registered and out of the 6 steps required to complete the programme the below highlights their progress.

- 5 have completed the programme in full

- 3 have achieved step 5
- 4 have achieved step 4
- 5 have achieved step 3
- 2 have achieved step 2
- 1 has achieved step 1
- Total number of young people over 18 who have completed – 3
- Total number of young people under 18 who have completed - 2
- Total number of young people under 18 where no steps have been completed – 8

Caseworkers continue to work closely with the Step Ladder Mentor to confirm registrations of young people to monitor user engagement and follow up with those who haven't registered yet. There has been slight delay this term due to the Stepladder Mentor leaving and temporary staff covering the role, we are hoping the regular contact with the Share Foundation will resume in the Autumn term.

We expect the number of registration and engagement to increase as Caseworkers continue discussing the programme in PEP meetings and reaching out to relevant network such as foster carers, schools, Designated Teachers and the young people directly. The Stepladder project manager is liaising with Barnet Virtual School to put a training/information session for foster carers to increase engagement in the Autumn term. Caseworkers continue to promote the Stepladder Project in PEPs and conversations with carers and social workers

### Aim Higher

Aim Higher provides discrete activities as well as progressive programmes to target learners who are underrepresented in higher education, to stay in education and progress. The LAC network within Aim Higher has been developing and delivering programmes to support LACs to explore opportunities around accessing higher education. In the Spring Term, 6 referrals were made to the 'Map of Me' Programme which enables the KS4 cohort to be mentored by a university student for 6 months building on confidence skills and goal setting. 3 of the 6 referrals have now successfully completed the 'Map of Me' Programme in June 2021.

The feedback has been very positive and with 2/3 young sharing that they found it very helpful and would recommend it to other young people. They particularly found that speaking with a university student helped them to gain a more realistic understanding of university life and an increased motivation to do well. One young person had to drop out of the programme due to unforeseen circumstances, but they shared that they would like to sign back up next year to complete the course.

### **b. Family Services**

The Virtual School has continued to work closely with Family Services, attending a number of meetings including Permanency Panel, Permanency Tracking Meeting and Vulnerable Adolescents Panel ensuring a clear link with the wider team. The Virtual School are also represented on CPOG, a multi-agency group which coordinates and advances the Corporate

Parenting plan in Barnet to improve outcomes for children in care and care leavers. The Headteacher is meeting monthly with Kate Jeffrey, Head of Service, Corporate Parenting.

The Virtual School is now represented on the BOP working party and attended the relaunch event with young people.

A pre-recorded training session for new social workers is being developed which can then be sent to all new starters along with an information pack is being developed

### c. Designated Teachers

The Virtual School has continued to send out two newsletters a term to our Designated Teachers and to offer a range of training. A New to Barnet/DT booklet has also been written which is now sent out to all new schools.

In the Autumn Term there were two training sessions for New to D.T./Barnet run by the Inclusion Advisory Team. We also held a training session on Race and Identity in Looked After Children. This proved very popular and so we ran the same session again which was offered out to staff in Education and Skills. Running the sessions virtually has enabled us to include D.T.s all over the country.

In the Spring Term, we offered a virtual training session on the **Power of Language**, delivered by Dr Karen Treisman. It was a thought-provoking session and had very positive feedback. This was then built on in two follow up sessions with our E.P.s who delivered two workshops:

**Supporting conversations with LAC around race and identity** How to have sensitive conversations with LAC around their race and activities to help LAC explore their racial and cultural identity

**Language that nurtures** Scenario based discussions, focusing on using language that connects and nurtures and how to use nurturing language when a LAC is in fight/flight/freeze or collapse mode

We also ran a training session specifically targeting our post 16 D.T.s. This focussed on:

- Challenges and risk factors for young people in care Post 16
- Co-ordinating and Managing the PEP process in a Post 16 setting
- Improving outcomes for young people in care in post 16 education
- Working strategically to support young people in care in your setting

In the Summer Term, we offered a virtual training session on 'Race and Identity in LAC – where are we now?'. All participants felt it would improve their practice in their workplace and increased their knowledge. We also hosted another session specifically targeting post 16 D.T.s to support them in their setting

### d. Foster Carers

Termly newsletters have been sent to foster carers and training offered across the year. Topics covered have included:

Behaviour as Communication - carers were able to give their in-put on issues arising within their home setting, differing from what they sometimes experience or have experienced with their own children.

Gaps in Learning with one session for primary and one for secondary

Managing, understanding, and organising homework and supporting reading in the home which gave a range of ideas to support young people with homework, including ways to break down difficult tasks as well as techniques and strategies to help with word reading, reading for meaning and reading for enjoyment.

Understanding and navigating the SEN processes in school which was to support carers with understanding what is meant by a SEN and the different SEN processes in school, as well as knowing where to get help and advice, and how a child/young person with Special Educational Needs can be supported within a school setting

An introduction to Emotion Coaching' Emotion Coaching a parenting technique that helps children understand their feelings.

Supporting your young person through the transition into the next school year which aimed to give an understanding of how to support with transition into the new school year.

#### **e. Educational Psychology (E.P.)**

The Virtual School has two days of EP support and over the year, they have supported the team in a variety of ways including:

- Supervision for senior members of the team
- Work Discussion Groups for caseworkers to explore working practices
- Consultation sessions for caseworkers to explore complex cases
- Direct pieces of work / assessments with young people, carers and schools for complex cases
- Training for caseworkers, designated teachers and carers
- Newsletter article to support D.T.s with young people returning to school
- Consultation slots for foster carers
- Research focus (currently post USAC young people with suspect learning needs)

Their input has been invaluable and has really supported young people in challenging situations.

#### **f. SEND and Inclusion**

Within the Virtual School there are a high number of children with special educational needs. Monthly meetings are held with the Head of SEN Assessments and Placements team to discuss any difficult cases and there is also occasional representation on the Complex Needs Panel to discuss and agree applications for EHCP assessments and funding requests.

#### **g. Pupil Placement Panel**

The Virtual School attends the fortnightly Pupil Placement Panel, a multi-agency group which monitors all statutory age pupil without a school place and formulates plans to ensure a school placement is identified or an education plan put in place.

#### **h. Inclusion Advisory Team (I.A.T.)**

The Virtual School has continued to benefit from the support of the I.A.T. team. The team have delivered a range of training, supported with Year 6 to 7 transition and carried out specific casework. They also carried out an independent review of the Virtual School which will be presented to the Challenge Committee.

#### **i. Working party - UASC with additional needs**

The Virtual School has set up a working party to look more closely at the issues for UASC young people who may have additional learning needs. An initial meeting was held in June 2020 and a small working party has been established including representatives from Barnet and Southgate College, the Refugee Council, social workers, educational psychologists and Westminster social care and Virtual School.

The reason for this focus is the number of post 16 UASC who appear to have additional learning needs but due to their levels of English are not adequately assessed therefore they

do not receive the appropriate support in college. This then results in them reaching adulthood without appropriate knowledge/support in place which makes it hard for them to maintain independence and puts them at risk of exploitation. The aim is to establish how UASCs can get effectively assessed in terms of ALN which would therefore mean meeting the criteria/funding being agreed for extra support. This can then be used to help identify extra-support needed in adulthood as well.

To date several meetings have been held, background reading carried out and a questionnaire written and sent out to colleges. The results of the questionnaire have been collated and sent out to those who completed it. These participants have also been invited to the next meeting in August.

### **13. Transition Hub (YEF Project) – Hassan Sufi**

Achieving for Children's Virtual School (Kingston, Richmond, Windsor and Maidenhead), in collaboration with Barnet Virtual School and St Mary's University were awarded a £750,000 research grant, for two years, by the Youth Endowment Foundation for a feasibility study to implement a Transition Hub for children in care aged 11 to 14 who are dealing with a significant transition in their lives e.g. new to care, new school, change of placement or school. This is hosted at Whitefield's Secondary School and was launched in October 2019

Barnet TEAM (Transitioning Everyone to Achieve More) Hub continues to advance its role in supporting children new to care and children in care experiencing a transition in home/school placement within the care system. As with other provisions, the Hub had to adjust to a virtual platform in which all students were on a bespoke virtual outreach support service around their social, emotional and academic needs. The Hub now continues to operate from Whitefield school providing In reach support and tuition for up to six weeks, as well as Outreach support. This outreach service occurs up to twice weekly for the first six weeks, which then gradually reduces as the child becomes better equipped to manage their difficult personal circumstances as a result of trauma, also taking into consideration the additional challenges arisen due to Covid-19. The service emphasises a school/carer/student ready approach to ensure all parties working directly with the child are empowered and assisted in ensuring the best possible outcomes for the child.

Over the course of the year (Sept 2020-July 2021) the Transition Hub has supported 15 students with 4 benefitting from In reach support (i.e. in the Transition Hub at Whitefield) and 11 benefitting from Outreach support either virtually or visiting them in their schools.

The feasibility research project was due to finish in August 2021 but an extension was granted for a further term (until December 2021). We have recently been told that YEF will be funding a further two terms (until July 2022) when the project will shift to an Outcomes Study Project.

Sarah Deale July 2021

## Appendix 1

### Other qualifications

In addition to G.C.S.E.s, young people achieved a range of other qualifications. These included:

Subject	Level 1	Level 2	
P.E. Sports BTEC	6	3	
Health and Social Care	2	1	
Hair and Beauty	1		
IT BTEC	1		
Spoken Language		1	
ESOL	2		
Science	2		
History	1	2	
Enterprise BTEC		1	
Construction BTEC	1	1	
Business		2	
Dance BTEC		2	
Functional Skills			
	Entry level	Level 1	Level 2
English	6	2	
Maths	2	3	1
Vocational skills	2		

### Young people who achieved no qualifications:

- 1 had significant mental health issues, poor attendance and placement moves
- 1 was attending the Pavilion and had poor attendance
- 1 had mental health issues and poor attendance and is planning to retake next year
- 1 was UASC and will be taking exams next year
- 1 had an EHCP and is working within KS2
- 1 had an EHCP and multiple school/placement moves
- 2 were new to care in the Summer Term – one UASC and one NEET.
- 1 was UASC with very poor attendance

## Appendix 2

### End of 13 Results

This is a breakdown of qualifications achieved – many young people achieved more than one.

Qualification				
<b>A Levels</b>				
Business – B History – D P.E. - C	Economics – B History – C Persian – A* BTEC Engineering - distinction	Chemistry – C Psychology – C Biology – C	Dance - B Computer Science – D English Literature - B	Psychology – C Media – B Sociology – A
Diploma in Performing Arts – Distinction (A level equivalent)	1 1		BTEC level 3 Music - Pass	1
ESOL – pre-entry	2		NVQ Hair and Beauty – Level 1	1
ESOL Entry Level 1 (L1)	4		Technical Certificate in Business Enterprise – Level 2	1
ESOL Entry Level 2 (L2)	8		Electrical Installation – Level 2	1
ESOL Entry Level 3 (L3)	6		Business Level 2	1
Functional Skills – L1 Maths	4		Art and Design Level 2	1
Functional Skills – L2 Maths	4		Creative Industries – Level 2 Merit	1
Functional Skills – L3 Maths	4		Sports Btec – Level 2	2
Functional Skills – L1 English	1		Plumbing L2	1
Functional Skills – L2 English	1		Motor Vehicle mechanics Level 2	1
ICT L1	1		Extended diploma in Sport – DD (leads onto equivalent of A levels)	1
ICT L2	1		GCSE retake	12
ICT L3	3			

Reason	No. of pupils
NEET	19
Prison	1
Special school	1
Did not complete course	3
No grading system	2
Employment	2
New to college	1

No qualification at  
the end of Year 13



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## Family Services

Document control	
<b>Document title</b>	<b>Annual Independent Reviewing Service Report</b>
<b>Document description</b>	This report provides an overview of service delivery for 2020/21.
<b>Document Author</b>	Samantha Maynard, Principal Independent Reviewing Officer
<b>Contributors</b>	Donna Swanberg, Head of Safeguarding, Quality Assurance & Workforce Development.
<b>Director of Children's Services</b>	Chris Munday
<b>Document production date</b>	25/05/21

## Service Structure and Delivery

The Independent Reviewing Service is managed within the Safeguarding, Quality Assurance and Workforce Development Service to ensure that the Independent Reviewing Officers' (IRO's) input and contribution to social work practice and care planning for children and young people is distinct from case holding service areas. The Head of Service has a direct line of accountability to the Executive Director of Children's Services: they meet regularly to review any practice concerns independently.

IROs' play an important role in ensuring that the local authority fulfils its responsibilities as Corporate Parent for the children it looks after by ensuring that they receive a good service that meets their range of needs and are provided with safe, stable care that enables them to flourish and achieve. IROs' provide quality assurance of children and young peoples' care plans by monitoring the effectiveness and progress of care planning, alongside, providing challenge to the professional systems responsible for supporting children and young people in care as necessary.

The IRO's core functions, tasks and responsibilities are set in statutory guidance within the Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations Volume 2: care planning, placement and case review (June 2015) and, the IRO Handbook: Statutory Guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers and local authorities which sets out their functions in relation to case management and review for Looked After Children (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2010).

The role of the IRO is to improve care planning and secure better outcomes for Looked After Children. They do this by chairing the child's reviews and monitoring the child's case on an ongoing basis with particular attention to:

- Monitor the performance by the local authority of their functions in relation to the child's case;
- Alert senior managers of identified areas of poor practice or patterns of concern;
- Recognise and report on good practice
- Participate in any review of the child's case;
- Promote the voice of the child and ensure that any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child concerning the case are given due consideration by the appropriate authority;
- Ensure the care plan for the child is informed by an up to date assessment and fully reflects the child's current needs and that actions are set out in the plan are consistent with the local authority's legal responsibilities towards the child.
- Prevent drift in care planning and delivery of services to children
- Make sure that children's care plans given proper consideration and weight to their wishes and feelings, and that they understand the implications of any changes made to his/her care plan.
- Ensure children understand how an advocate can help

Statutory Guidance recommends that IROs hold caseloads of between 50 to 70 Looked After Children, to deliver a good quality of service that includes the full range of functions set out in the IRO handbook. Caseloads have remained within statutory guidelines and average 60 - 65 cases per IRO.

The IRO Team is comprised of four permanent full-time Independent Reviewing Officers and one Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer who chairs annual foster carer reviews who are supervised by the Principal Independent Reviewing Officer. There is one dedicated Conference and Reviewing Support Administrator who supports the team. In addition to the permanent IRO's two commissioned providers deliver additional capacity (3 IRO's) as and when required. This ensures the IRO team can be flexible and responsive to the changing needs of the service.

## Annual performance 2020/21

For the 330 children that were in care in the reporting period 2020/21; the data and performance indicators show:

- 97.5% of Looked After Children Reviews were held within statutory timescales
- 94.0% of children and young people participated in their Children in Care reviews.

There is a slight increase on 2019/20 performance in reviews held in statutory timescales (from 96.6%) and a positive increase in child participation (from 91.3%).

There was an overall increase in the number of children in care in the reporting period 2020/21. The highest the number of children and young people in care at any one time reached 342 and is currently at 335 – this is average figure as reported in the 2019/20 annual report.

During the Covid-19 pandemic additional IRO support from the commissioned providers was utilised due to staff illness and bereavement leave, as opposed to the small rise in children looked after.

## Focus on Care Planning

***Ensure the care plan for the child is informed by an up to date assessment and fully reflects the child's current needs and that actions are set out in the plan are consistent with the local authority's legal responsibilities towards the child.***

-The All About Me Assessment is fully embedded into the case recording system. In most cases the All About Me assessment/care plan is updated and available for the IRO prior to the review and there is discussion between the IRO and the social work team prior to the review to ensure the information sharing is up-to-date and the IRO is aware of any developments in the child's circumstances. Performance, audit data and tracking reflect the positive efforts being made by social work practitioners to ensure the All About Me assessments are updated before reviews.

-The All About Me assessment/care plan requires the voice of the child to be evidenced throughout their care planning, alongside updating any change in circumstances and the child's needs. The IRO service notes that children and young people's plans mostly reflect current needs and they have been able to participate in their reviews and contribute to their care plans and pathway plans directly or indirectly.

-Most challenge provided by IRO's is positively received and responded to by social work teams. Challenge is clear and consistent and is evidenced in discussions, emails and virtual meetings with the social work teams and where necessary, in escalation reports.

***Alert senior managers of identified areas of poor practice or patterns of concern & recognise and report on good practice***

-The increased communication and consultation between the IRO's and social work teams has led to fewer practice alerts which when raised, have been swiftly addressed which also means a significantly reduced number of formal escalations.

-In the reporting period there were 14 formal escalations. Just over half the escalations (8) were related to processes, i.e. care plans not being updated by the social workers, preventing IRO's from completing planning outcomes on LCS.

- The remaining escalations were a mixture of practice, planning and recording: one was in relation to a UASC young person being left without subsistence or support from a provider over a weekend; one was about a care plan not meeting the needs of a young person; one was relation to unprofessional practice by an interpreter; one was in relation to concerns about a foster carer's practice; one where the mother had concerns about the placement which required follow up by the social work team and one was due to the lack of visits recorded on the child's file.

-Unregulated placements are noted to occur for a variety of different reasons (connected carers are not positively assessed but care plans are court directed, Regulation 24 placements have not progressed to panel for matching, semi-independent placements or placements for children with complex needs) and are monitored through the reviewing process, alongside scrutiny by senior management permanency and tracking panels. Overall, risk assessments are reported to be completed, the quality of care provided in unregulated placements is mostly positive, but practice would be strengthened by a more robust approach to timeframes for placement matching processes.

-Also, there is evidence of IRO challenging care planning that is incongruent with the wishes and feelings of the child and ensuring children and young people's voices are well represented.

-Where there is the need for formal escalation, this is tracked, monitored by the Principal Reviewing Officer and where necessary escalated to Heads of Service.

-The Principal Reviewing Officer provides focused feedback and support to ensure that IRO's provide appropriate and respectful challenge to professionals when care plans are not sufficiently addressing or progressing the support children need to achieve good outcomes.

### ***Prevent drift in care planning and delivery of services to children***

The IRO service are focussed on preventing drift in care planning and delivery of services and are able to evidence impact on case planning and positive outcomes for young people. Examples of this can be evidenced and include issues such as IRO's challenging Section 20 arrangements when required in order to progress permanency and longer-term placement /legal planning.

-The decrease in escalations in relation to drift in care planning can be attributed to the increased collaboration between the IRO service and the Corporate Parenting Service which ensures care plans are updated in a timely manner which supports the progression of plans and practice.

-The Covid-19 lockdown has seen a significant increase in communication and consultation between the IRO's and social work teams and partner agencies. Joint working between the IRO's and social work teams is firmly established and IRO's are now routinely invited to permanency planning meetings, professional meetings, the Vulnerable Adolescents at Risk Panel and Child Exploitation and Missing planning meetings.

-Steps have being made to further embed the working relationship between the IRO service and Assessment, Intervention & Planning Service (AIP). The IRO's linked to the AIP service are being invited to team meetings on a regular basis, alongside a bi-monthly forum chaired by an Assistant Head of Service to discuss any themes arising, best practice, escalations and encourage a systemic approach to working relationships.

### **Child Participation**

***Promote the voice of the child and ensure that any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child concerning the case are given due consideration by the appropriate authority;***

The pandemic has had a marked impact on the quality of participation of children and young people in their reviews. Although, child participation increased due to the delivery of virtual meetings (and lockdown periods) the IRO's observed that quality of meaningful and helpful participation by children in their reviews was varied.

-Children under the age of five were a particularly challenging cohort to build relationships as without direct observations of their relationships with carers, IRO's have been more dependent on the views of other professionals (e.g. carers, nurseries and social workers) to inform their views of the quality of care received in placements and their experiences of contact, where relevant. Young children found the virtual platforms confusing and are limited for observing relationships and quality of interactions.

-The quality of participation from older primary school aged children (5-12 years) was slightly better but children expressed that they disliked engaging with their IRO's through virtual means (laptops, social media, telephone) often stating they preferred to talk face-to-face and tended to sit out of view of the camera. Some children responded to more creative ways of engagement such as being asked to give a virtual tour of their bedroom or playing a

game but the limited opportunities to observe a child in their environment and gain their views in a relationship-based context was a challenge.

-Secondary school aged children were much more comfortable and willing to engage in the virtual platforms with all the professionals present. There was an overall preference by young people to have a 1:1 conversation with their IRO and they needed encouragement to share information in the virtual meetings. IRO's and other professionals present were able to feedback their wishes and feelings.

-Due to security reasons, those young people on remand could not take part in a virtual review and reviews were more difficult to schedule with youth justice facilities due to the pandemic. However, all but one young person on remand was spoken to by their IRO for the purpose of their reviews and their wishes and feelings reflected in the review process.

-Prior to the pandemic a priority for the IRO service was to continue to develop and embed our child participation model by engaging more children and holding age appropriate activities and events chosen by them. Event days were planned to take place during the May, October and February half terms in 2020/21. In addition to event days, IRO's had planned to provide one to one activity in the community for young people who are reluctant to attend their reviews or participate in group activities. Lockdown restrictions coupled with child and professional anxieties (around transmission of Covid-19) meant children and young people were not afforded the opportunity to engage with their respective IRO's outside of the formal reviewing process. While virtual 1:1 interaction did take place the feedback, ideas and views of children for ways to improve service delivery and their experiences was limited. It was a challenge for children to see beyond the current situation, the demands of online learning and virtual visits and their predominant message was for a return to 'real life meetings'. Face to face activities in smaller age appropriate groups are been planned for the summer holidays with children suggesting a variety of options, e.g., picnics, go-carting, Go-Ape and going to the seaside.

-A newly designed consultation booklet for children to give their views had been co-produced with children just prior to the lockdown. However, completion of the consultation booklet (hard copy and electronic) during the pandemic has been minimal. The use of the electronic version was not prioritised by IRO's given the views and frustrations expressed by children and young people about their experiences of virtual platforms. However, children's verbal feedback and views are recorded and appropriately responded to at every opportunity.

-The personalised record of review written to children in letter form has been in use for this period and IRO's and practitioners have reported positive feedback about this. Children, carers and partner agencies have commented on the less formal nature of the letter, the use of child friendly (and age appropriate) language and, particularly, the personalisation of content.

### **- Ensure children understand how an advocate can help**

The IRO service, alongside the social work practitioners, have explained the advocate role to children and young people and encouraged participation with the advocates and independent visitors available to them through the commissioned services. The utilisation of advocates has increased and feedback during reviews from children and young people is generally positive about their experience of advocacy.

## **IRO Footprint**

### **Monitor the performance by the local authority of their functions in relation to the child's case**

There is clear evidence of increased IRO oversight on children's records. As outlined above IRO's provide appropriate challenge and escalate concerns when necessary which contributes to robust and timely planning for children. Despite the challenges presented by the pandemic statutory reviews are taking place regularly and within timescale. Midway reviews are routinely scheduled at statutory reviews and recorded on children's files once they have taken place, along with case discussions involving the IRO.

The Principal Reviewing Officer attends the weekly Permanence Tracker Meeting, weekly Permanency Planning Panel and monthly Vulnerable Adolescents at Risk Panel; this enables the IRO service to contribute to planning, provide positive feedback and/or raise concerns about progression of permanency for the children and young people who are discussed.

## **2020/21 Priorities**

### **Child Participation Model**

-A key priority for the year ahead following the lifting of the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions is to safely resume face-to-face statutory reviews in the children's placements, particularly for those children and young people who were newly accommodated during the Covid-19 lockdown period.

-to encourage the completion of the consultation booklets to capture their views and suggestion about the care plan.

-to resume co-produced participation events with children to strengthen their opportunities for participation, alongside, working closely with the Service Development Officer to use child and parent feedback to help improve services offered to children they are involved with.

### **IRO Practice Development**

-There is a need to ensure that all IRO's continue to develop their capacity to drive high quality care planning activity and to monitor the effectiveness of children's plans by providing respectful and robust challenge to professionals when plans are not achieving good outcomes for children, and to do so consistently.

-The IRO's are being supported to achieve these aims through supervision - both formal and informal, and group supervision. Safeguarding training provided for the workforce is attended by the IRO's but a priority for the year ahead is for the Principal Independent Reviewing Officer to work with the Workforce Development Team to create internal training seminars, alongside, training specific to the role of the IRO from external providers. Knowledge gained from training days will be shared across the IRO service and wider service where relevant.

-The Principal Reviewing Officer will continue to support the IRO's practice through performance data, quality assuring the IRO's case recording and the letters of review and be ongoing live observation of the IRO's chairing reviews to give feedback and support learning.

-Data is used to support management oversight and the development of the IRO service. This includes individual performance data and the monitoring of statutory 6 requirements i.e. timescales of decisions and minutes to prevent practice falling below expected standards.

### ***IRO Workshops***

-CIC process workshops facilitated by IROs' were placed on hold during the Covid-19 lockdown. These workshops will be completed as an online training offer and will now commence in on 8.07.21. The workshops will focus on children in care processes and care planning with an emphasis of the timescales, expectations and process for the All About Me assessments and plans.

## **Conclusion**

Communication and consultation between IRO's, social work teams and partner agencies has increased significantly and contributes to robust care planning and outcomes for children and young people.

The IRO footprint is more evident in cases on the system: midway tracking and case discussions are recorded. Respectful challenge to drive improvements in care planning for children is positively received and responded which is evidenced in the reduction in practice alerts and formal escalations.

The key focus for the IRO is to resume face-to-face review meetings and events to develop their relationships with their children and young people. Bespoke practice development, training, child participation and using service user feedback to inform service development will be the key priorities for 2021/22.



**Family Services**

<b>Document control</b>	
<b>Document title</b>	<b>Annual Fostering Service Report</b>
<b>Document description</b>	This report provides an overview of service delivery for 2020/2021.
<b>Document Author</b>	Lisa Sayers, Assistant Head of Service – Fostering & Leaving Care Kate Jeffrey, Head of Service - Corporate Parenting
<b>Director of Children’s Services</b>	Chris Munday
<b>Document production date</b>	June 2021

## The Fostering Service Annual Report 2020-2021

### Introduction

This report provides an overview of the work of the Barnet Fostering Service for the year 2020-2021 and highlights the service outcomes, quality of practice and innovations in association with plans to continue to improve the service. This report should be read in conjunction with the Fostering Panel Annual review 2020-2021.

Ensuring children and young people in the care of Barnet Family Services flourish and thrive is at the heart of Barnet's resilience-based approach to social work practice. We know that it is fundamental that children and young people in our care are placed in the best provision to meet their diverse and individual needs, as informed by our placement sufficiency strategy 2019 -2023 and the newly devised guidance document, Who We Place Where.

2020-21 saw the fostering service progress with a recruitment strategy successfully generating a significant number of enquiries by prospective foster carers despite the inherent challenges of working throughout a global pandemic that saw the world pause with lockdown restrictions and families living in isolation. Our assessments of potential carers remained thorough and dynamic, continuing our best practice standards with robust and curious thinking about the family holistically and approving 16 new carers. We continued to offer a good and varied training program to support all carers with their development enabling them to be the best carers possible for Barnet's looked after children. To support our foster carers we developed an online survey in December and applied this feedback to service design for 2021-2021 including our out of hours support offer to carers launched during foster carer fortnight in May 2021.

### Covid – 19 Pandemic

At the start of the year, the country and the world faced unprecedented times with the emergence of Covid -19. By the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020 the UK went into a national lockdown, and Barnet Family Services quickly responded to the need for remote working and virtual support with creativity. All children and the fostering households were reviewed and RAG rated (Red – Amber – Green) according to their level of need and complexity. Visits to carers and children continued to take place using the hybrid model implemented across Family Services, using video calls and online mediums such as Skype and MS-

Teams alongside face to face doorstep and garden visits, and when possible during period of eased restrictions, visits in the community. Legislative changes including The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations allowed local authorities flexibility in using fostering panels as decision making forums and guidance on approvals to ensure all children coming into care and those needing to move between placements were provided with safe and caring homes to meet their needs.

Like families across the world, foster carers also experienced the challenges of living in isolation, managing the needs of home schooling and home working, often with limited support available from wider family and friends. Whilst all looked after children were considered vulnerable children and therefore able to continue attending schools during closures throughout much of the year, many carers preferred to keep children at home and reported that this unique time provided them with opportunities they would not have otherwise had, such as gardening together, learning to cook, playing games and bonding moments watching films and reading books. Whilst this year was difficult and challenging, with everyone experiencing some level of grief and loss in their personal lives, feedback from carers suggest the year also contained moments of joy and a community spirit, as people came together to support and acknowledge each other. Virtual events such as Foster Carer Appreciation Day in October with an award ceremony for carers long service, the Christmas Party in December and fortnightly foster carer drop-in Skype meetings with the fostering team and guests provided unique opportunities to come together and celebrate and gain support during the most trying of times.

### **Recruitment and Assessment**

In January 2020, the Carer Recruitment and Assessment Team formerly separated into two distinct teams, the Carer Assessment Team and the Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team. The Carer Assessment Team is now responsible for assessing prospective connected carers through Viability Assessments, Special Guardian Assessments and Regulation 24/25 assessments (also known as kinship assessments), while the Fostering Recruitment team are responsible for the advertising, recruiting and the assessment of prospective foster carers. 2020-2021 was the first full year with these changes being in place.

The Fostering Recruitment team are involved with prospective carers from the point of initial enquiry, until they are formally presented to the Fostering Panel for approval, after which their approval as foster carers are ratified by the Agency Decision Maker. Once approved, fostering households are

allocated a supervising social worker in the Fostering Support team, who will then oversee their development as carers, provide them with regular supervision and support them in their care of Barnet's looked after children.

Our placement demand transformation is underpinned by developing our in-house offer for foster carers and supported lodgings hosts. To aid the program of development, the foster care services have undergone a review focusing on a needs led analysis of the service. The analysis has enabled the service to implement systemic changes to how we deliver services across fostering, utilizing virtual working mechanism such as virtual fostering panels and hybrid models of assessment and supervision, alongside continuing to develop our online social media presence through Instagram and Facebook as both a recruitment tool and a support service. Despite the challenges of the pandemic the Recruitment team has continued to recruit foster carers utilizing social media platforms alongside more traditional means of print advertising. The service has also seen some foster carers leave or retiring from fostering, whilst the demand for carers to provide warm and loving home for the most vulnerable children has continued to increase.

#### **Enquiries & Approvals:**

In 2020/2021, following the creation of a separate team for recruiting foster carers and supported lodgings host, the target for recruitment was set to 35 fostering households. Unsurprisingly we were unable to meet this target, given the challenges of recruiting in a year of global lockdowns and living in isolation. However, using creative and dynamic approaches on social media platforms and our more usual campaigns we were able to successfully recruit 11 foster carer households and 5 supported lodgings hosts. This is significantly more than other local authorities within the North London Fostering and Permanency Consortium, and is considered a real achievement for the service.

As outlined in our improvement plan of 2018/2019, we introduced our digital application process in 2020 to ensure consistency and ease of the application process. There was an expectation that the number of enquiries would reduce after the introduction of this 'screening form', although there would be an increase in the quality of applicants coming through.

A reduction in enquiries was visible from the start of the year with only 11 enquiries being placed in April. During 2019/2020 there were 201 initial enquiries up from 194 in 2018/2019. This reduced to 168 in 2020/21. However, despite a lower number of enquiries Barnet's conversion rate from enquiries to approval increased from 2019/2020 at 3.98%, to 8.92% in 2020/2021, closer to the

national average. This also evidences the success of the digital screening process ensuring the most appropriate applicants are applying.

Enquiries	Total
2019/20	201
2020/21	168

Table 1: **Barnet Fostering Enquiries 2019/2020 – 2020/2021**

Contrary with previous year’s data where the majority of enquiries originated from outreach recruitment (36), the top performer of this year was Barnet’s own website enquiries (35), followed by Facebook (31). As can be seen in the virtual way of working, web-based sources have become the most popular mechanisms for generating enquiries. Word of mouth remains a significant source of enquiries, generating 27 enquiries this year. The following table details the breakdown in enquires throughout the year.

Source	Approved	Closed	Enquiry	Screening/IV	Screening/IV (On Hold)	Stage 2	Grand Total
Bus Stop Ad	0	0	0	1	0	1	2
Consortium	0	2	0	1	0	0	3
Facebook	1	24	4	1	1	0	31
Internal Comms	0	2	0	0	1	0	3
Leaflet	0	1	0	2	0	0	3
Online	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Other	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
Previously enquired	1	2	0	3	1	0	7
Publication	0	0	1	2	1	0	4
Referral	0	8	0	0	0	0	8
Search Engine	1	14	0	2	1	2	20
Website	0	28	0	0	4	3	35
WOM	1	21	0	3	1	1	27
Unknown	0	16	0	2	3	1	22
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>168</b>

Table 2: **Barnet Fostering Enquiries analysis 2020 - 2021**

### Review of targets for 2020/21

As targets for 2020/2021 of 35 foster carers / Supported Lodging Hosts were unfortunately not achieved, we have reviewed our targets for fostering households and supported lodgings hosts in consultation with our placement sufficiency program. Despite acknowledging the challenges of recruiting fostering households within a context of Covid-19, our placement demand and sufficiency strategy indicates the need for us to continue to be ambitious to best meet the needs of Barnet's looked after children. Our recruitment strategy was set for 2020- 2022. The targets set remains and include:

- 30 mainstream foster carers
- 2 Parent & Child foster carers
- 4 specialist carers for teens
- 4 respite carers for children with disabilities
- 10 supported lodgings Hosts

### Fostering Households

As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021, Barnet have 95 approved mainstream foster carers, totalling 208 placements for children within these homes, as well as 24 connected carers.

### Fostering household resignations

During the period from April 2020 – March 2021, 13 foster carers resigned from Barnet.

The reasons were:

2	As a result of death or due to Covid 19 impact
2	Following the granted of Special Guardianship Order
1	Transferred to IFA
4	Due to changes in personal circumstances
1	To progress to Staying Put arrangement
1	Moved to a new house outside of authority
2	other

In addition, 19 Regulation 24/25 (Kinship) carer were deregistered with 7 of them converting to Special Guardianship arrangements. The other 12 are no longer caring for children, who have either returned to their parents' care, or moved to approved foster carers with care plans of long term fostering.

## Fostering Support and Development

Foster care is the right choice for the majority of children in our care. High-quality foster care in a stable family-like environment can be a protective factor in supporting and enabling children to achieve positive outcomes and thrive throughout their lives. When we place in foster care, we focus on the needs of the child, the quality of the care and the outcomes we want to achieve for the child. We think systematically about their relationships and networks in their local area and the support that will enable them to thrive, including aiming to place siblings together where possible. We also weight in cultural matching and other individual factors. Our goal is to find an alternative home where they are loved, kept safe and are encouraged to be the best they can be.

The fostering support and development team are responsible for the support and development of foster carers to ensure that they meet National Minimum Standards as underpinned by the Fostering Services Regulations 2011, providing care for Barnet's children which supports their overall well-being resilience and aspirations. The team of social workers have several years of experience in child protection and fostering. They have also attended training offered to foster carers in Attuned Therapeutic Care, PACE and working with the mental health needs of children and young people looked after to support them in working therapeutically.

The team supports foster carers in providing a good standard of care, providing challenge, reflection and support to develop foster carers practice. They have prioritised support to foster carers throughout the pandemic in recognising that the support needs of foster carers in meeting the needs of children in their care. Some carers have required additional support around maintaining education at school and sometimes at home whilst keeping safe has required them to be resourceful, flexible and creative. During this time face to face foster carer support groups which would usually be held monthly evolved into weekly virtual coffee mornings also attended by members of the Senior Management team and other colleagues from across Family Services including the paediatrician and health team, the clinical team and caseworkers from the virtual school.

Foster carers very much appreciated having dialogue with senior managers and immediate responses to their questions and concerns. Providing access to PPE and COVID 19 vaccine for foster carers early on in the vaccine program was also much appreciated by foster carers. Supporting them throughout 2020/21 has required sensitivity, flexibility and resilience.

Training for foster carers has been provided via virtual platforms and via e-learning, with attendance at and completion of courses remaining at consistently high levels. A number of carers, whilst

missing the face to face training have also found the flexibility of out of hours training schedules helpful to their busy lives.

The development of foster carers skills base is integral to meeting the needs of Barnet's children, whilst building foster carers capacity to care for children with complex needs. In addition to this the team supported foster carers to explore and develop to expand their approval age range or approval numbers where possible and explore permanence and post 18 staying put arrangements.

Foster carers access support from BICS (Barnet Integrated Clinical Services) through consultations and therapeutic sessions with the child in their care, enhancing the support provided to children and carers in the home. Training opportunities for Barnet foster carers is also accessible via the North London Consortium of which Barnet is part of along with Camden, Haringey, Hackney, Enfield and Islington. The North London Consortium also provides training for men who foster which is a valuable resource.

As of March 2021, Barnet had 95 approved mainstream fostering households, a slight decrease from the 102 fostering households in the previous year. In regard to demographics, 65% of foster carer households live within the Barnet area and 35% of households are based out of borough. In terms of diversity 84% of foster carers are female, 38% are of White British origin with second largest groups being of Caribbean origin and African. 35 of our foster carers over 60 years old.

Barnet has continued to offer our foster carers a comprehensive training offer, and this was also reflected in the feedback from a Foster Carer survey that took place (see below for further details); with 75% of foster carers rating the training as very good/good. 88% of foster carers have attended training within the last year.

### **Staying Put**

The 'Staying Put' Scheme allows care leavers to stay with their foster carers after they turn 18, if the young person and foster carer agree to this arrangement. As at 31 March 2021, Barnet had 16 care experienced young people remaining living with their former foster parent. The data evidences a significant drop of young people remaining living with their carers under Staying Put arrangements, in comparison to 2019/20, when 27 young people remained living with their foster carers post 18. This is attributed to a variety of reasons including, young people being accommodated later in adolescence and preferring to move into their own accommodation. Staying Put placements supports young people continuing to engage in education while providing a gradual transition to living independently.

Conditions conducive to the Staying Put arrangement include a positive placement that meets the young person's needs, and the will of both the young person and foster carer to continue with the arrangement. Staying Put living arrangements are reviewed annually with the carers, young person, Personal Adviser and Supervising social worker.

### Supported Lodgings

Barnet's Supported Lodgings scheme was introduced in 2018/2019 with 2 supported lodgings carers were successfully recruited in the first year. Capacity increased with a further 3 in 2019, to 5 being approved in 2020-2021, following a targeted recruitment campaign.

### Foster Carer Survey

In the context of this peculiar year and in honor of our commitment to working collaboratively we designed the foster carer survey with current and newly approved foster carers. Completed in December 2020, the survey had a response rate of 45% (41 out of 92 fostering households) and demonstrated that the majority of foster carers (63%) felt good about fostering for Barnet. The results also highlighted areas where we can work together to develop the service, particularly around our support offer and how we communicate and work with foster carers as professionals. In follow-up interviews, foster carers reflected on how they appreciate the support that they receive from their social workers, but also that there are moments when communication is not as efficient as they would like. This feedback has informed the service delivery improvement plan for 2021 -2022.

The majority of foster carers (78%) feel that their relationship with their social worker is good or very good. The relationship has been key to how services and support has been provided. Survey responses indicated that foster carers thought the service as a whole is good, with one carer explaining how she has been a foster carer for 18 years, and that 'Barnet had always been outstanding'. She explained that she feels that she has always had support from her supervising social worker for anything she has ever wanted. However, staff and foster carers also commented on the need to improve relationships, and the need for the relationship between carer and social worker to be framed in a professional context. This would include open communication and appreciation. While 63% rated the availability of support during office hours as very good or good, only 30% were satisfied with the out of hours support. This feedback has informed the newly developed out of hours offer, launched as part of Fostering Fortnight in May 2021.

### Review of objectives - what we have done

- Improved handover process from Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team to Fostering Support team to ensure stability of carers and placements
- Improved induction for newly approved foster carers and developed a 2 year newly approved Foster Carer Support Offer
- Supervising Social Workers now lead on Skills to Foster Training in partnership with foster carers provided through virtual mediums of MS Teams.
- Developed training to enhance knowledge and skills of foster carers, such as attuned therapeutic training and PACE training
- Progressed therapeutic training opportunities for foster carers through the Reflective Fostering Project running in partnership with the Anna Freud Centre and University of Hertfordshire
- Staying Put carers have named supervising social worker
- Developed virtual support groups for foster carers to provide spaces for reflection, challenge and learning
- Progressed therapeutic training opportunities for foster carers through the Reflective Fostering Project running in partnership with the Anna Freud Centre
- Continued focus on individual development plans for foster carers
- Progressed recruitment activities to virtual events, such as our information sessions, Skills to Foster and our development of social media platforms

### Objectives for 2021 - 2022

- Develop Barnet Fostering Web pages and ensuring consistency across Barnet's website for an improved journey, including monitoring and reviewing the online enquiry submission, information sessions and initial visit booking systems
- Increase focus on social media presence and campaigns, including Facebook boosts, google AdWords to increase website views alongside Barnet fostering Instagram page (@barnetfostering and hashtag #more2give).
- Improve and expand internal communications with staff and current cohort of foster carers to increase recruitment, including financial incentive with the refer a friend scheme
- Consistent transition between assessment social work and supervising social worker from Fostering Support Service to ensure carers feel supported, held and contained throughout their first child being placed.

- Recruitment and retention of permanent staff members to ensure better service user experiences.
- Transferring the Foster carer handbook to more accessible online version and consideration of progressing to a more user-friendly platform for ease for foster carers
- Update Policies and procedures to ensure effective support for the Fostering service and our Foster carers.
- Foster carer case file audit template to be developed for the development of a Fostering specific audit programme at intervals throughout the year.
- Themes from audits to be analysed and used to continue to develop the service.
- Progression of the annual Foster Carer Survey to be completed to understand the strengths and challenges within the service and aid service development.
- Review virtual fostering panel with a view to move to a hybrid model to allow prospective applicants to attend panel in person and provide better real-life experience
- Work and consult with Foster carers to develop a Foster carers charter to support a shared understanding of expectations of the fostering service and of our foster carers
- Development of therapeutic foster carer cohort to support our inhouse therapeutic children's home Green Bank House
- Continue with online support groups and celebration events, including Foster Carer Appreciation Day and Foster Carer Fortnight

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