



# **Brent Looked After Children and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy 2025 - 2029**

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## Foreword

Writing a new sufficiency strategy amidst a changing children's social care landscape has provided many challenges. There have been and will continue to be several significant factors, each with the potential to reshape the environment in which this strategy will operate. Despite these uncertainties, the focus remains on ensuring children and young people have access to the right support, at the right time and in the right place to meet their needs.

Recommendations from the Independent Review of Children's Social Care and the change in government following the 2024 General Election has led to shifts in policy priorities, funding allocations and the overall strategic direction of children's social care. Brent, along with all other local authorities is developing and delivering local responses to national policy direction, (the Families First reform programme) to develop multi-agency child protection teams and family group decision making, as well as supporting families with the cost-of-living crisis.

The cost of residential placements has risen over the period of the previous strategy placing strain on budgets, also exacerbated by the fluctuation in the number of children placed in these settings across a single year which at the time of writing this new strategy is the highest it has been for several years. There have been changes to regulations for supported accommodation for 16 – 17-year-old young people, and these reforms have redefined the standards and expectations for care, further influencing how sufficiency is planned and achieved. It is unclear if this will be the last reform to regulated services or whether there is more to come for 18+ providers.

Given these factors, this sufficiency strategy has been developed with a commitment to flexibility and responsiveness. Brent recognises the assumptions made today may need to be revisited as new information becomes available and as the broader context evolves. This strategy is designed to be a live document, capable of adapting to the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. It is within in this context that this strategy will now be reviewed and refreshed annually.

## Executive Summary

The Brent Looked After Children and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2025-2029 sets out how Brent Council, as Corporate Parent, meets its statutory Sufficiency Duty as laid down in Section 22G of the Children Act 1989. The strategy draws on statutory guidance on Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children (DfE 2010), the Children Act 2004, the Children Leaving Care Act 2000, the Children and Social Work Act 2017 and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023.

The strategy describes how Brent will meet the current and future placement needs of looked after children (CLA) and care experienced young people. It builds on existing duties in law to promote and safeguard the welfare and well-being of children and high-quality care planning. The strategy provides an update on progress in delivering the Looked After Children and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2020-2024 and details current and planned actions to meet placement sufficiency over the next four years in line with the demographic profile of Brent's population.

There are many challenges that local authorities are experiencing when delivering and building sufficiency. Nationally there is an increasing number of children entering care which often exceeds the number of suitable placements. Locally, the number of children in care has remained relatively stable over the past 4 years however, due to the increased number of children with complex needs, older children coming into care and sibling groups means finding a suitable placement is difficult. This in turn increases the likelihood of placement instability, which can cause placement breakdown and further disruption to the child or young person.

Recruitment and retention issues of foster carers is felt both within local authorities and the private sector. This is particularly prevalent for local authorities to both recruit and retain internal foster carers, especially for those with complex needs and older teenagers. As there is a shortfall of foster carers, there is a requirement to provide a competitive offer to be successful in recruitment. There has been an increase in out-of-area placements which were not necessary for safeguarding reasons but have had to be made due to sufficiency reasons. This disrupts education, friendships, family networks and makes it more difficult for professionals involved in the lives of children and young people to provide high quality, consistent support.

This strategy is focused on a strategic principle of increasing the local sufficiency of placements for children and young people through increasing the number of in-house foster carers and increasing the availability of residential placements which can support a range of complex needs. Collectively this will achieve the outcome of keeping children and young people close to their own communities in high quality, value for money and locally available care.

The Brent Looked After Children and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2025-2029 is based on Brent's values and ways of working and has been developed with the views of children and young people very much at the forefront.

This strategy aligns with other Brent strategies including but not limited to:

- The Borough Plan 2023-27, particularly the Best Start in Life
- The Looked After Children and Care Leavers' Strategy 2025-2027
- The Brent Youth Strategy 2025-2028
- The Brent SEND Strategy 2021-2025
- The Brent Participation Strategy 2024-27
- The Brent Youth Justice Plan 2025-2028

## The Brent Approach

The Brent Sufficiency Strategy is steered by the five priorities set out in the borough plan:

- Prosperity and Stability in Brent
- A Cleaner, Greener Future
- Thriving Communities
- The Best Start in Life
- A Healthier Brent

Brent's Children, Young People and Community Development Directorate operates to ensure that the following outcomes are achieved:

- Children and young people are happy, healthy and thrive
- Children and young people are cared for in homes that are safe and secure
- Children, young people, and their families can reach their full potential
- Families and communities are safe and resilient.

Brent values for children and young people:

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

In March 2024, Brent published its revised Ways of Working document, 'This is Brent CYP. This is how we grow'. This document builds on the previous practice framework and embeds anti-racist practice into daily interactions with children, young people and their families.

Brent's approach to meeting its sufficiency duty is underpinned by a clear alignment between borough-wide priorities, directorate-level outcomes and a set of core values that place children, young people, and their families at the centre of service planning and delivery. This integrated framework ensures that sufficiency is not viewed in isolation, but as part of a broader commitment to equity, inclusion and long-term wellbeing. The revised Ways of Working, with its emphasis on anti-racist and relationship-based practice, further reinforces this commitment, embedding it into everyday professional interactions. Collectively, these guiding principles ensure that Brent's Sufficiency Strategy is both responsive to need and reflective of the borough's ambition to support all children and young people to thrive.

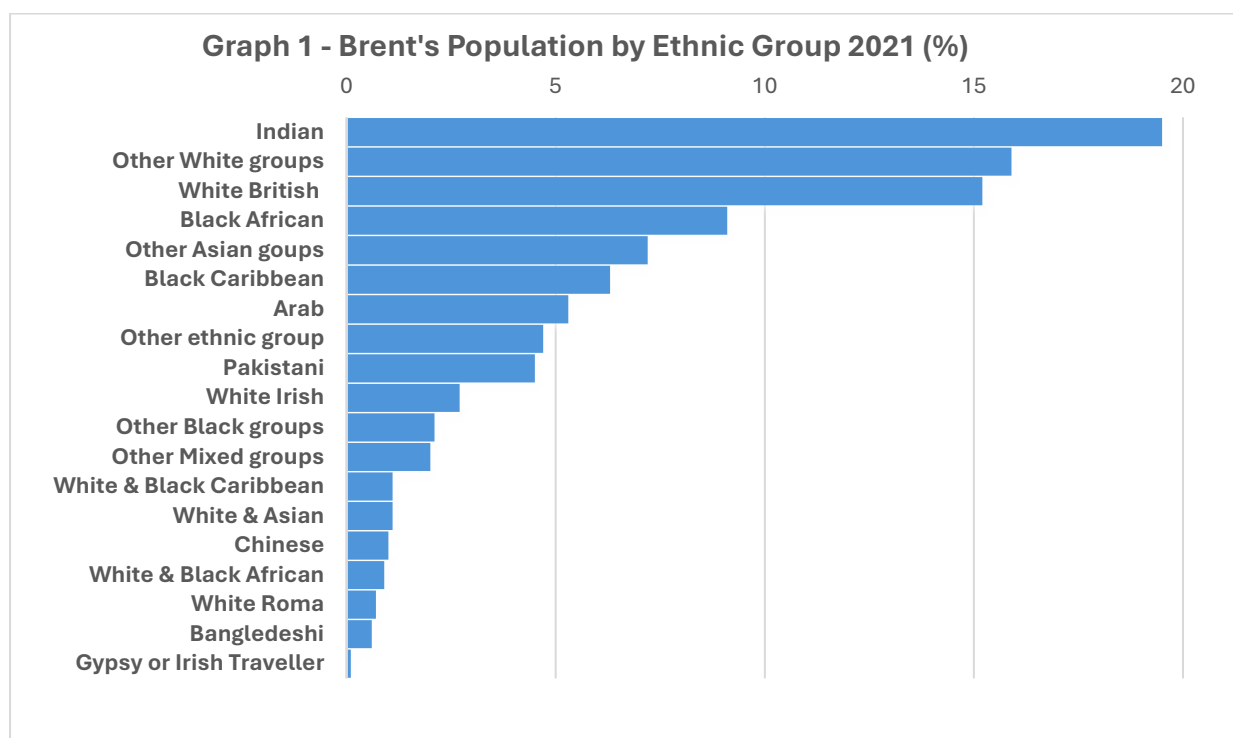
## The Brent Context

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimates the population of Brent to be approximately 344,500 as of June 2023, making Brent the 5<sup>th</sup> largest borough in London by population size.<sup>1</sup> Brent is the most densely populated Outer London borough and 14<sup>th</sup> highest in England.<sup>2</sup>

The 2021 Census showed that compared to 2011, Brent's 0 to 4 population decreased by 11%. However, its 5 to 9 population increased by 6%, 10 to 14 population increased by 16%, 15 to 19 population increased by 11% and 20 to 24 population increased by 2%.<sup>3</sup>

The Office for National Statistics showed Brent was the 67<sup>th</sup> most income-deprived local authority in England in 2019. 33 Brent neighbourhoods, out of 173, were among the 20% most income-deprived in England.<sup>4</sup> The End Child Poverty coalition estimated in 2022-2023 that 35.1% of children in Brent were living in poverty, which equates to 28,137 children.<sup>5</sup>

Brent is one of the most ethnically diverse boroughs in London and has the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest percentage of Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups in England and Wales after Newham at 65%. A high-level breakdown is 34.6% White ethnic groups, 32.8% Asian/ Asian British groups, 17.5% Black/ Black British groups, 5.1% Mixed/ multiple ethnic groups and 10% other ethnic groups.<sup>6</sup> Around 150 languages are spoken in Brent based on language data from the January 2020 Pupil Census<sup>7</sup>.



<sup>1</sup> [Population change in Brent Briefing 2024](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Population change in Brent Briefing 2024](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Brent population change, Census 2021 – ONS](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Exploring local income deprivation](#)

<sup>5</sup> [End Child Poverty](#)

<sup>6</sup> [2021 Census - Ethnicity topic report](#)

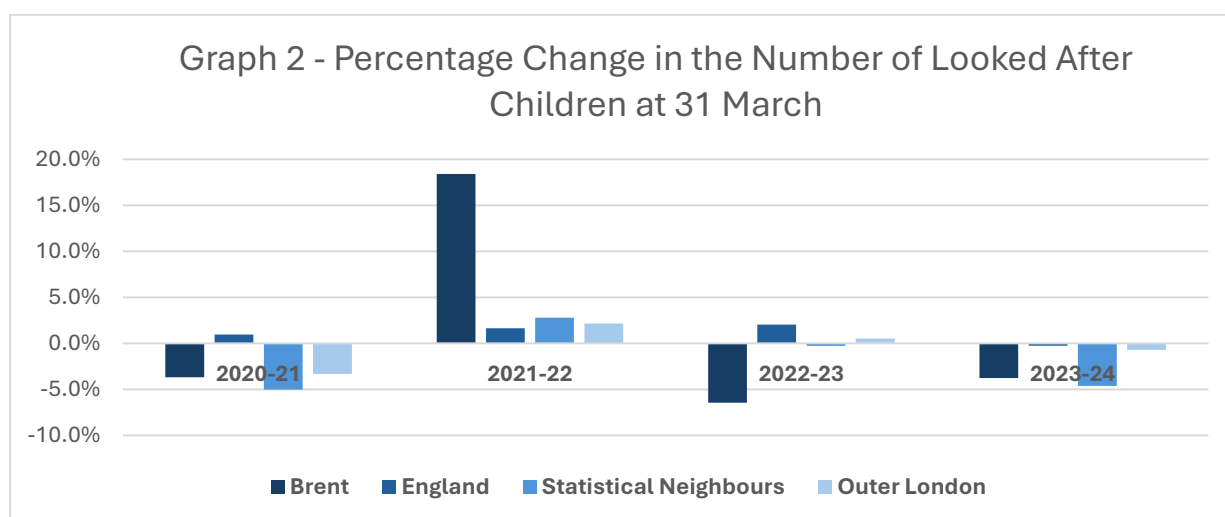
<sup>7</sup> [Community profile](#)

## Level of Need

In the year ending 31 March 2024, Brent recorded 5,297 episodes of need, equating to a rate of 718 per 10,000 children. While this is slightly below the average for statistical neighbours (738 per 10,000), it is higher than the national average for England (630 per 10,000). This highlights a continued level of demand for early help and statutory social care services in the borough.

As of the same date, 3,500 children and young people in Brent had an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). Since 2020, the number of maintained EHCPs has grown at an average annual rate of 8.8%, reflecting increasing complexity of need and demand for specialist support across education, health, and care. This growth has been consistent over the last year and as of 31 March 2025, the local authority was maintaining 3,907 EHCPs.

The Looked After Children (CLA) population in Brent has shown some fluctuation over the past five years. From a peak of 341 children in March 2022, the number decreased to 307 by March 2024 and reduced further to 298 in March 2025. This represents a notable percentage reduction, outpacing the trends seen in both statistical neighbours, the Outer London and national average, as illustrated in Graph 2.



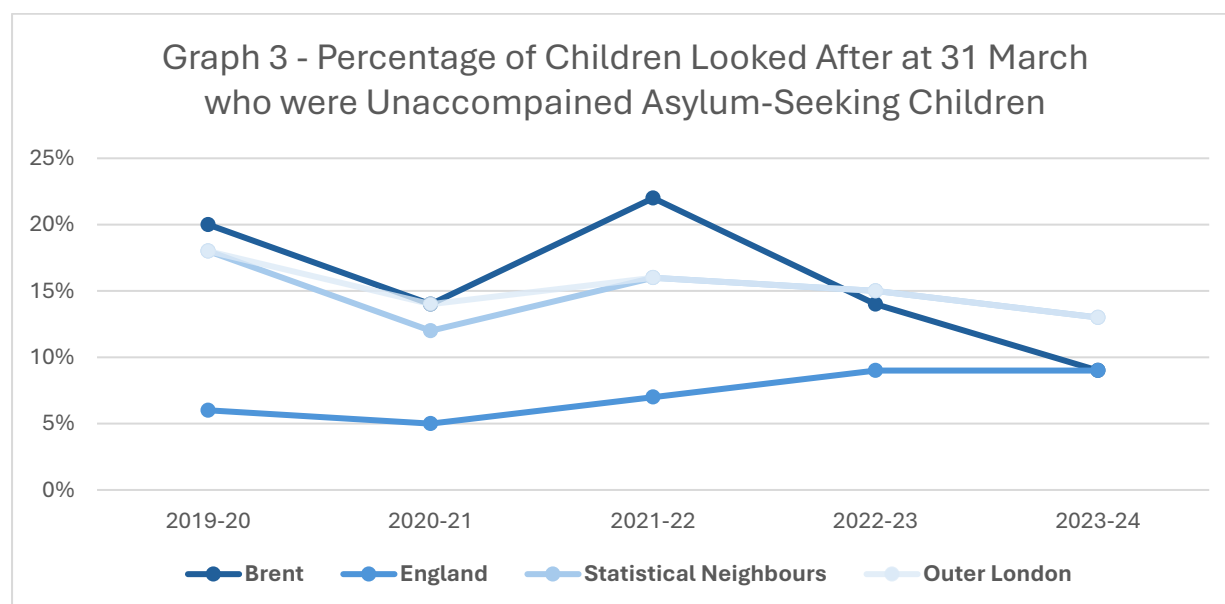
Brent's CLA rate per 10,000 children remains below statistical neighbours, England and Outer London averages, as shown in Table 1 below, indicating effective early intervention, permanency planning and a reduction in the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC). As of March 2025, the rate of looked after children per 10,000 children under the age of 18 has lowered to 40. The comparative data for Statistical Neighbours, Outer London and England was not published at the time of writing this strategy.

**Table 1: Rate of Looked After Children per 10,000 children under the age of 18**

| Year Ending   | Brent | Statistical Neighbours | Outer London | England |
|---------------|-------|------------------------|--------------|---------|
| 31 March 2020 | 39    | 52                     | 46           | 68      |
| 31 March 2021 | 38    | 51                     | 44           | 69      |
| 31 March 2022 | 47    | 53                     | 46           | 70      |
| 31 March 2023 | 44    | 53                     | 46           | 71      |
| 31 March 2024 | 42    | 50                     | 45           | 70      |

|               |    |   |   |   |
|---------------|----|---|---|---|
| 31 March 2025 | 40 | - | - | - |
|---------------|----|---|---|---|

The temporary increase in CLA numbers in 2022 coincided with a sharp rise in UASC. This was driven by a surge in arrivals via small boats across the English Channel, the implementation of the mandatory National Transfer Scheme by the government of the time, and a significant increase in asylum applications, particularly from Albanian and Afghan nationals. Graph 3 shows in Brent the number of UASC has now decreased to be comparable with England averages, but is lower than Outer London and statistical neighbours. As of March 2025, the percentage of UASC has slightly increased to 10% (it should be noted that the number of UASC has remained the same but due to the overall CLA population reducing, the proportion is higher).



## Profile of Looked After Children (CLA)

As of 31 March 2024, Brent's CLA population was predominantly composed of older children, with 36% aged 10-15 and 33% aged 16 and over. This age profile is mirrored in entry points into care, as 29% of new entrants were aged 10-15 and 31% were 16 and over. These figures reflect a consistent trend of older entrants into care, observed both nationally and among Brent's statistical neighbours, continuing patterns identified in the previous Brent Sufficiency Strategy (2020-2024). The provisional March 2025 data shows this trend as continuing.

This demographic trend presents significant placement sufficiency challenges. Older children entering care are more likely to have complex emotional, behavioural, and / or mental health needs, which can limit placement options.

Table 2 outlines the demographic composition by gender, ethnicity and age of Brent's CLA population as of 31 March 2024 and provisional data for March 2025. The gender distribution aligns closely with both statistical neighbours and the national CLA profile in England, indicating a consistent trend across regions.

However, a significant disparity is observed in the ethnic breakdown. Black or Black British children are markedly overrepresented in Brent's CLA population (33%), with proportions substantially exceeding those of England (7%), statistical neighbours (25%) and Outer London



(20%). This overrepresentation presents challenges in securing culturally appropriate placements that fully meet the individual needs and identities of these young people.

Conversely, children from Asian or Asian British and White backgrounds are underrepresented when compared to Brent's broader population demographics. This imbalance highlights the importance of developing targeted strategies to ensure equitable support and culturally responsive care for all children particularly in their placements, while also addressing the systemic factors contributing to disproportionality.

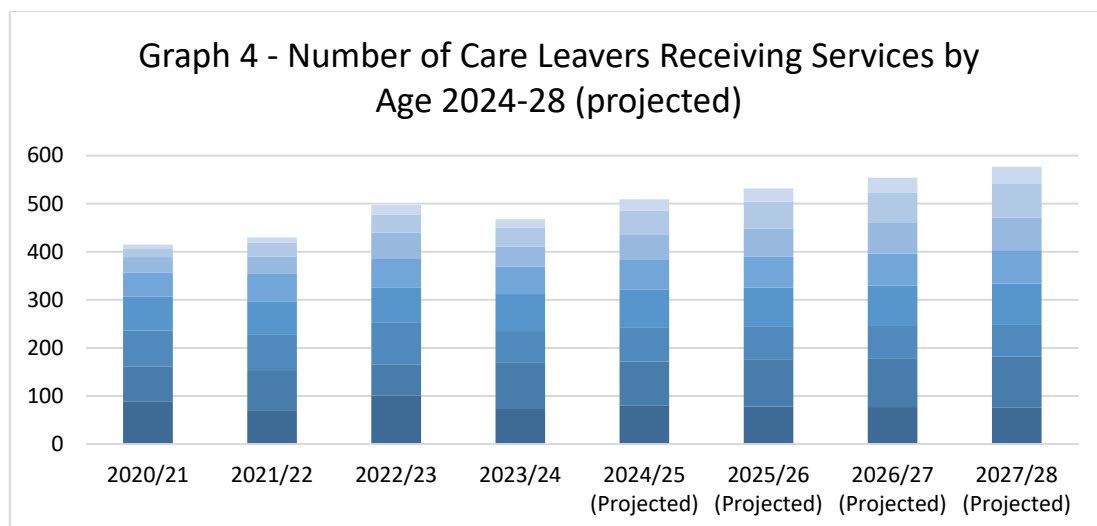
**Table 2: Profile of Looked After Children as at 31/03/2024 and 31/03/2025**

|                            | March 2024 | March 2024 % | Provisional March 2025 | Provisional March 2025 (%) |
|----------------------------|------------|--------------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| Number of children in care | 307        |              | 296                    |                            |
| <b>Gender</b>              |            |              |                        |                            |
| Male                       | 170        | 55           | 163                    | 55                         |
| Female                     | 137        | 45           | 133                    | 45                         |
| <b>Ethnicity</b>           |            |              |                        |                            |
| Asian or Asian British     | 28         | 9            | 36                     | 12                         |
| Black or Black British     | 102        | 33           | 87                     | 29                         |
| Mixed                      | 61         | 20           | 62                     | 21                         |
| Not Known                  | 0          | 0            | 0                      | 0                          |
| Other Ethnic Group         | 46         | 15           | 46                     | 16                         |
| White                      | 70         | 23           | 65                     | 22                         |
| <b>Age</b>                 |            |              |                        |                            |
| Under 1                    | 10         | 3            | 16                     | 5                          |
| 1-4                        | 50         | 16           | 27                     | 9                          |
| 5-9                        | 37         | 12           | 46                     | 16                         |
| 10-15                      | 110        | 36           | 110                    | 37                         |
| 16 and over                | 100        | 33           | 97                     | 33                         |

## Profile of Care Leavers

Brent's care leaver population (501) is broadly in line with its statistical neighbours (476). As of 31 March 2024, Brent had 81 care leavers aged 17-18, comparable with statistical neighbours averages of 86. There were 264 care leavers aged 19-21, compared to statistical neighbours averages of 253 care leavers and Brent had 156 care leavers aged 22-25 who requested and received support compared to the average of 137 care leavers for statistical neighbours.

Graph 4 below outlines a projection of the future number of care leavers eligible to receive services up to 2028.

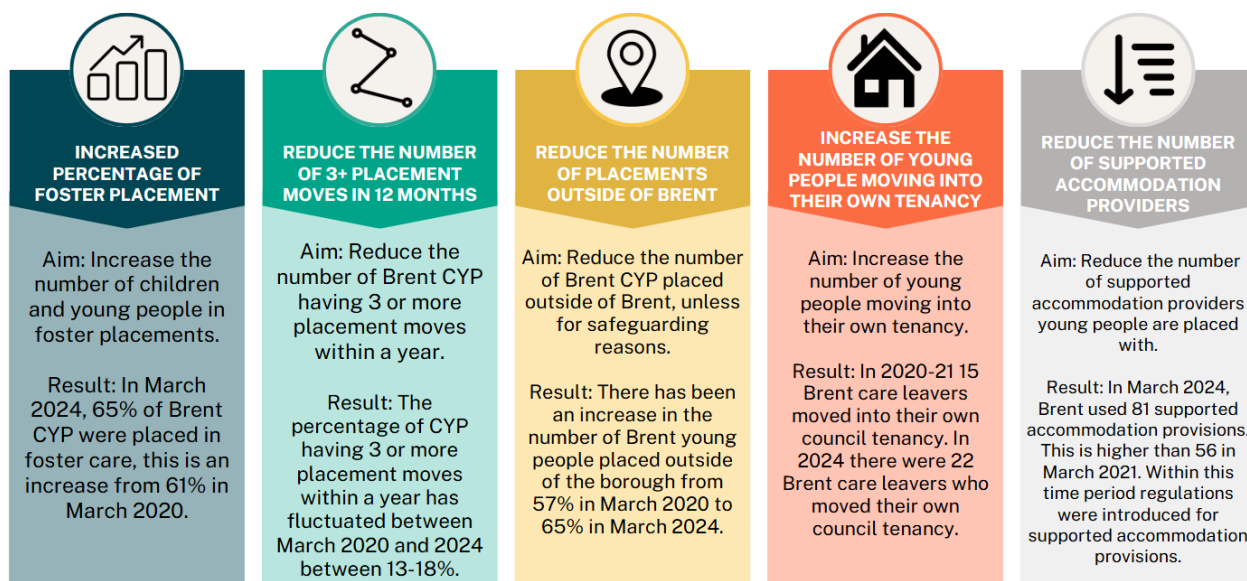


This upward trend is driven in part by the cohort of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who entered care in 2021–22 and who have now transitioned into care leaver status. Delays in asylum decisions, averaging 758 days in early 2022, have contributed to prolonged periods in care, increasing the number of eligible care leavers.<sup>8</sup>

Additionally, housing pressures in Brent, also being experienced nationally, have led to a rise in homelessness applications in the general Brent population. This has reduced the availability of social tenancies for care leavers, despite their Priority B status, as demand for housing is higher than the rate social housing can be supplied. As a result, many care experienced young people remain in Local Authority funded accommodation for longer than both required and anticipated. These factors combined suggest that Brent will face growing demand for placements and may need to extend support arrangements such as Staying Put and explore Staying Close.

<sup>8</sup> [Home Office asylum delays worse for unaccompanied children since 2015 with Albanian children most affected - Migrant & Refugee Children's Legal Unit](#)

## Delivery of the 2020 – 2024 Sufficiency Strategy



The 2020-2024 Sufficiency Strategy identified a number of actions to address the challenges facing the local authority across different placement types. The table below outlines the progress against the outcome measures for these actions.

| Placement               | Action in 2020-24 Strategy   | Outcome Measure  | Progress  |
|-------------------------|--|--|---|
| Fostering               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the number of local foster carers for children in older age groups through targeted recruitment campaigns.</li> <li>• Work with West London authorities to develop a regional approach to fostering services.</li> <li>• Work with the WLA to develop a market of high support foster placements for complex children, including those stepping down from residential placements.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More children and young people placed in foster placements, including as step-down arrangements from residential settings</li> <li>• A reduction in CLA experiencing 3+ placement moves within 12 months</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In March 2024, 65% of Brent children and young people were placed in foster care, there is an increase from 61% in March 2020.</li> <li>• The percentage of children and young people having 3 or more placement moves within a year has fluctuated but was 16% at both 31 March 2020 and 2024.</li> </ul> |
| Supported Accommodation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review block contract arrangements</li> <li>• Identify a small group of providers who can deliver local placements to enable young people to live close to their family</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brent places in a smaller number of semi-independent providers</li> <li>• A reduction in LAC experiencing 3+ placement moves within 12 months</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In March 2024, Brent used 81 supported accommodation providers. This is higher than the 56 supported accommodation providers used in March 2021. Within</li> </ul>   |

|                       |   |  |   |
|-----------------------|---|--|---|
|                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a quality assurance framework informed by care lived experience and sets quality standards in line with or above national expectations</li> <li>• Deliver a series of provider forums and training events to develop a market that meets the needs of Brent's young people</li> <li>• Embed an accredited life-skills programme for care leavers through semi-independent providers</li> </ul>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More care leavers moving into their own tenancies before the age of 20</li> </ul>   | <p>this time period new regulations were introduced within the supported accommodation sector and the Brent care leaver population increased.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In 2020-21, 15 Brent care leavers moved into their own tenancy. In 2024, 22 Brent care leavers moved into their own tenancy. This has become more challenging with the increase in care leavers and shortage of social housing available.</li> <li>• Implementation of an independence programme delivered through Brent's Gordon Brown Centre attended by 50 young people in 2024/25.</li> <li>• Quality assurance framework implemented and includes Care Quality Ambassadors.</li> <li>• Development of a shared house model through a pilot</li> </ul> |
| Residential provision | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embed an outcomes-based commissioning approach with residential providers to develop a shared understanding of expected outcomes</li> <li>• Develop relationships with local providers who will work with the council to meet the needs of Brent's most complex young people</li> <li>• Work closely in partnership with health partners in identifying provision that meets the needs of complex</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More young people stepping down to foster placements before the age of 16</li> <li>• A reduction in placements outside of London (unless for safeguarding reasons)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There has been an increase from 57% to 65% of children placed outside of the borough between March 2021 to March 2024.</li> <li>• 71% of Brent children were placed within 20 miles of the child's home, this has increased from 60% in March 2020.</li> <li>• Development of a new local authority residential home, due to open in 2025.</li> </ul>  |

|                             |   |   |   |
|-----------------------------|---|---|---|
|                             | children and children with SEND   |   |   |
| Parent and baby assessments | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commission a new service for independent community assessments</li> <li>• Work with local providers to develop family assessment services that meet Brent's needs</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to a greater range of high-quality family assessment options that reduce the need for use of residential settings.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through working with the Commissioning Alliance a framework has been implemented to support the provision of parent and baby assessments. This was introduced in 2024 and therefore, the impact cannot be fully measured.</li> </ul> |

## The voice of children and young people in the strategy

“We want all our young people from all backgrounds to be seen and heard in our services. We will create more opportunities and spaces to empower our young people to have their say.” (Brent Borough Plan 2023-27)

Every two years the Bright Spots survey is distributed to Brent young people to enable them to reflect on their experiences which can then be used to influence services, and the most recent survey (August 2024) has influenced the development of this strategy.

82 looked after children completed the survey and their feedback on placements is below:

- 93% of young people aged 4-17 reported ‘always’ feeling safe where they lived (82% general population).
- 100% of 4-7 years reported feeling settled at home and liking their bedroom.
- 56% of children aged 8-11 years reported ‘always’ feeling settled where they lived (78% of children in other LAs) and 44% ‘sometimes’ feeling settled where they lived.
- 76% of 11-17 years reported ‘always’ feeling settled at home.

140 care leavers responded to the survey, a response rate of 29%. Of those who completed the survey, 36% live in a flat or house they rent, 22% live in supported accommodation and 14% are with foster carer(s) (staying put). 3 young people were in short term/ emergency accommodation and 6 selected ‘other’.

- 77% of care leavers reported ‘always’ feeling safe at home (other LAs average 64%).
- 69% of care leavers reported ‘always’ feeling safe in their area (other LAs average 60%).
- 64% of care leavers reported ‘always’ feeling settled where they lived (other LAs average 51%).
- 66% of care leavers responded ‘mainly yes’ when asked if where they lived was right for them (84% general population).

“I feel great about where I live. I get along with staff and the other people I live with.”

“Very good accommodation with enough space for me as I live alone. Nice view.”

“I really feel comfortable where I live.”

“It’s okay for me but I feel ready to move on into independence.”

“Did not originally plan on renting a private room and living with others... but it’ll do for now.”

“It’s too far from everywhere I need to go (work/college). I feel isolated from my friends and family. I want to move close to them.”

In reflecting on the development of this strategy, it became clear that the voice of young people with lived experience was not as prevalent as it should have been. Recognising this gap, Brent took meaningful steps in 2023 to strengthen youth participation in shaping services. This included the recruitment of care experienced young people as Care Quality Ambassadors, ensuring their voices directly inform quality assurance and service improvement. Young people were also invited to sit on the interview panel for the new Brent residential children’s home, embedding their perspectives into key decision-making processes and inform key developments of the home such as the décor.

Additionally, the implementation of the new Brent Participation Strategy 2024-2027 has provided a structured framework to ensure that children and young people are consistently engaged in shaping the services that affect them. This strategy outlines how Brent works with children and young people to have meaningful and inclusive involvement in decision-making and co-design of services.

Some of the ways young people can participate is through Brent Youth Parliament, Brent Care Journeys 2.0 and Brent Youth Forum, and care experienced young people are part of Council meetings and committees to provide scrutiny, present questions to officers and members, and provide young people's views on issues. There has been an increase in the last two years of the current strategy of young people challenging officers and elected members in a range of Council forums on issues which affect young people.

An action plan will be created to ensure that the voice of young people is heard, listened to and acted upon over the period of this strategy. These developments mark a significant shift towards more inclusive and responsive commissioning practices that meet the needs of Brent young people.

## Achievements During the 2020 – 2024 Sufficiency Strategy

### **ILACS Ofsted Inspection**

On 20 – 24 February 2023, Brent Council's Children's Services was inspected by Ofsted and received an overall rating of 'good', reflecting the positive impact on children's lives and futures. The report highlighted the 'passionate and committed' practitioners, 'strong political support for children's services' and 'investment to grow the workforce'. The below list outlines the areas of sufficiency raised in the report:

- The creation of the Accelerated Support Team provided effective support to families through strengthening relationships and enabling children to remain at home or return quickly.
- Managers respond quickly to ensure children are moved into appropriate settings quickly and appropriately safeguarded avoiding the need for unregistered children's homes.
- Although children regularly have suitable placements such as foster carers, family and friend carers, children are often not placed locally.
- UASC are placed in 'well-matched homes' and receive relevant support by specialist services.
- 'Suitable and safe accommodation' is found for many care leavers.

### **Brent's own Children's Residential Home**

In June 2022, the Department for Education (DfE) opened applications for its Wave 2 Children's Home Capital Grant Programme. This provided an opportunity for local authorities to apply for matched capital funding available to create provision for residential children's homes for children and young people in their own local area. Brent was successful and was awarded £1.1m which the Council match funded.

Brent's Residential Children's Home will deliver a four-bed residential step-down home within Brent for looked after adolescents (aged 12 – 16) with social, emotional and behavioural needs. It will provide three bedrooms for a step-down provision to prepare young people who are in residential settings away from the borough for a move into a local fostering placement, supported accommodation (if 16+) or to return home. The remaining one bedroom will be allocated for emergency placements to enable a short-term response for young people in crisis. This is due to open in the 2025/2026 financial year.

### **Brent's response to Supported Accommodation Regulations**

Brent Council responded decisively to the introduction of supported accommodation regulations in October 2023 for 16- and 17-year-olds by embedding a robust and accountable process to safeguard care leavers. This included the implementation of clear checks and balances, with senior managers providing regular scrutiny to ensure high standards were consistently met. The Council took a firm position by refusing to commission providers not listed on the Ofsted monthly register, reinforcing its commitment to regulatory compliance.

Brent also employed six former care experienced young people as Care Quality Ambassadors, ensuring the voices of those with lived experience inform quality assurance processes of providers. Alongside this, the Council continues to work constructively with providers to support improvements where needed, while also sharing information with West London colleagues to raise concerns and coordinate responses to unregulated providers. This multi-layered approach reflects Brent's strategic commitment to delivering safe, supportive, and high-quality accommodation for all young people leaving care.



# Challenges During the 2020 – 2024 Sufficiency Strategy

## Increased reliance on Residential and Supported Accommodation Provisions

In the last couple of years of the previous strategy, Brent Council has experienced increasing challenges in securing appropriate placements for older children entering care. This has been in particular with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) who are accepting fewer referrals for older young people. This is due to a growing trend of risk aversion among IFAs who themselves are grappling with issues of foster carer sufficiency, compounded by a reduction of available in-house foster carers.

There has been a decline in the number of internal foster households from 100 in 2021 to 88 in 2025 and the number of places has decreased from 153 to 128 (inclusive of mainstream foster carers and connected person carers). The Ofsted Fostering in England (1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024) report showed the amount of approved or newly approved mainstream local authority fostering households between 2020 and 2024 reduced by 14%, so this reduced sufficiency is a national issue and not unique to Brent.<sup>9</sup>

The impact of all of this is resulting in older children more likely to be placed in costlier, residential settings or an earlier transition into 16+ supported accommodation than would be preferred. Although now regulated for 16–17-year-olds, supported accommodation arrangements may not always provide the ideal level of support to meet identified needs and oversight, potentially impacting long-term outcomes for young people.

This reduction in overall foster carer sufficiency places additional financial pressures on local placement resources and can impact the stability and continuity of care for older children and young people.

## Adoption Rates

The 2023/24 Annual Report from Adoption England highlighted a growing disparity between the number of children with a plan for adoption and the number of prospective adopters coming forward. Economic uncertainty and the ongoing cost of living crisis have contributed to many individuals and families delaying decisions to expand their households. The report also underscores that delays in finding suitable matches are disproportionately affecting certain groups-particularly sibling groups, children aged five and over, and those from Black and mixed heritage backgrounds, further compounding the challenges in achieving timely and stable permanency outcomes and increasing the demand for foster placements.<sup>10</sup> That said, Brent is working closely with Adopt London West to ensure there are sufficient local adopts to meet the needs of children with an adoption plan.

## Placement Stability

Looked after children are enabled to have better outcomes when they have stable placements. The NSPCC outline how placement breakdowns can have harmful consequences on a child's emotional wellbeing and mental health.<sup>11</sup> In addition, it halts the development of stable

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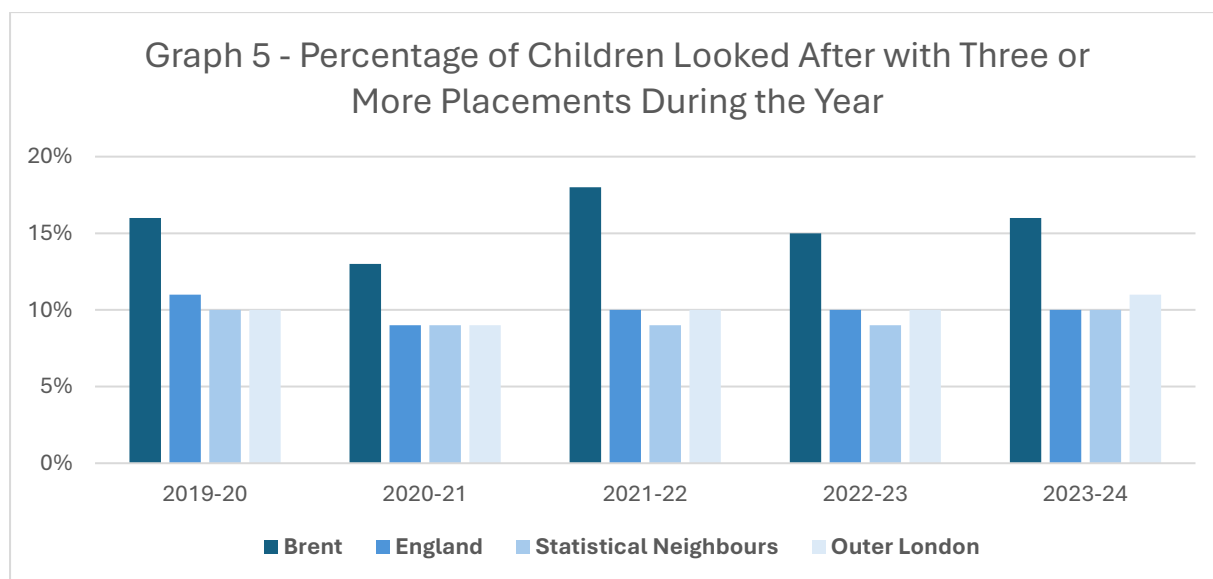
<sup>9</sup> [Fostering in England 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 - GOV.UK](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Adoption England Annual Report 2023-24 Web.pdf](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Looked after children | NSPCC Learning](#)

relationships with adults who could support them. The Fostering Network echoes this stating that instability can lead to poor outcomes including poorer educational outcomes, breakdown of relationships with trusted adults and increase in vulnerability.<sup>12</sup>

Graph 5 shows the percentage of looked after children as of the 31 March 2019-2024 with three or more placement moves during the year. Over the five-year period, Brent's percentage values have consistently remained above both the English and Outer London average and those of its statistical neighbours. While these three groups have shown relative stability, hovering around 9–11%, Brent's figures have fluctuated more significantly, peaking at 18% in 2021–22 before returning to 16% in 2023–24. This has since further reduced to 12% as of March 2025.



Brent has taken proactive steps to reduce placement breakdowns by introducing placement stability meetings at an earlier stage, aiming to address emerging issues before they escalate to crisis point. This approach has been strengthened by improved collaboration between the Commissioning Resource Team, social workers and the Fostering Team, enabling earlier and more effective interventions. The Commissioning Resource Team has enhanced its engagement with providers, building stronger partnerships to discuss issues which are likely to disrupt a placement and has plans in place to further strengthen market management capacity.

The Commissioning Resource Team has also increased the frequency of quality assurance activities to ensure providers are held accountable for delivering high standards of care which is also assisting in managing the placement market in a positive way. This quality assurance activity involves six Care Quality Ambassadors, all of whom are Care Experienced Young People and of the 32 quality assurance visits between 2024–2025, 10 of which involved Care Quality Ambassadors.

Additionally, Brent Council has commissioned the Positive Support Group for the current financial year (2025-26) following a successful test and learn pilot that ran from July 2023. The Children in Care Resilience Service aims to increase the ability and confidence of foster carers and providers to successfully support young people to manage challenging and complex behaviours, prevent placement breakdowns and step ups from foster care into costlier residential placements.

<sup>12</sup> [full-response-to-the-independent-review-of-childrens-social-care-england-the-fostering-network.pdf](#)

## The 2025 – 2029 Sufficiency Strategy

As a local authority, the looked after children and care leaver placement profile as of 31 March 2024 highlights both strengths and areas requiring strategic focus. Data is a snapshot of provisional data from 31 March 2025, but also draws on data from 31 March 2024 that allows comparison to statistical neighbours, Outer London or national data for England (information for 2025 is yet to be published). It is important to note that numbers change throughout the year dependent on a range of factors including the number of children placed in residential homes and secure units. Youth Justice data indicates a higher-than-usual number of remand cases, with six young people in remand care at the start of 2025/26.

From a legal status perspective, the high proportion of children under Section 31 care orders (48%) reflects the long-term nature of many placements, while 28% remain under Section 20 arrangements. To strengthen sufficiency, Brent must look at increasing local placement options, particularly fostering. These steps will support better planning, reduce reliance on out-of-borough placements and ultimately improve outcomes for Brent children in care.

Notably, 65% of Brent’s looked after children are placed out of borough, which impacts on their access to local services and community ties. This is similar to statistical neighbours (61%) and Outer London (60%) and higher than the average across England (45%). While 71% of placements are within 20 miles of the child’s home, this strategy must address the 28% placed further afield or with unknown proximity.

**Table 3: Placement Profile of Looked After Children as at 31/03/2024 and 31/03/2025**

|                                      | March 2024 | March 2024 (%) | Provisional March 2025 | Provisional March 2025 (%) |
|--------------------------------------|------------|----------------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>Placement Type</b>                |            |                |                        |                            |
| Adoption                             | 5          | 1.6            | 7                      | 2.4                        |
| Brent foster placement               | 49         | 16             | 47                     | 15.8                       |
| Independent foster placement         | 98         | 31.9           | 86                     | 29.1                       |
| Kinship placement                    | 52         | 16.9           | 41                     | 13.9                       |
| Placement with parents               | 8          | 2.6            | 13                     | 4.4                        |
| Secure unit                          | 1          | 0.3            | 1                      | 0.3                        |
| Children’s residential home          | 22         | 7.2            | 37                     | 12.5                       |
| Supported accommodation              | 30         | 9.8            | 43                     | 14.5                       |
| Other                                | 42         | 13.7           | 21                     | 7.1                        |
| <b>Placement Location</b>            |            |                |                        |                            |
| In borough                           | 108        | 35             | 101                    | 34                         |
| Out of borough                       | 199        | 65             | 195                    | 66                         |
| <b>Proximity to the child’s home</b> |            |                |                        |                            |
| Under 20 miles                       | 219        | 71.3           | 213                    | 72                         |
| Over 20 miles                        | 59         | 19.2           | 53                     | 17.9                       |

|                                       |     |      |     |      |
|---------------------------------------|-----|------|-----|------|
| Child's home is not known or recorded | 29  | 9.5  | 30  | 10.1 |
| <b>Legal Status</b>                   |     |      |     |      |
| Section 20                            | 87  | 28.3 | 86  | 29.1 |
| Section 38                            | 57  | 18.6 | 38  | 12.8 |
| Section 31                            | 146 | 47.6 | 150 | 50.7 |
| Placement Order                       | 16  | 5.2  | 16  | 5.4  |
| Other                                 | 1   | 0.3  | 6   | 2    |

## Adoption

Brent Council remains part of the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), Adopt London West (ALW), in partnership with the London Boroughs of Ealing, Hounslow, and Hammersmith & Fulham. Inter-country adoption referrals continue to be managed by the Inter-Country Adoption Centre, a specialist Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA).

Due to the relatively small number of cases, assessing adoption performance remains challenging as anomalies can affect trends. The 2024/25 financial year recorded the highest number of adoptions since ALW began delivering services on behalf of Brent. Over the past three years, the number of days between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family has increased from 468 in April 2023 to 503 in April 2024 and 512 in April 2025 meaning they remain in current placement longer and is potentially prevents another Brent young person accessing a suitable placement.

In 2024/25, 18 adopter households were approved, a slight decrease from 20 approvals in the previous year. This reduction is attributed to the departure of a social worker, which temporarily impacted assessment capacity. Of the approved adopters:

- 72% identify as White British
- 11% as Black
- 17% as Mixed White/Asian
- 17% identify as LGBTQ+

There remains a notable shortfall in the number of Black adopters, a well-documented issue that led to the collaborative initiative of the Black Adoption Project between four Regional Adoption Agencies covering 24 London boroughs, aimed at addressing this gap. For the period of this sufficiency strategy, this project remains on-going and reducing adoption timescales is an area of development for the Looked After Children and Permanency Service

## Fostering and Kinship Care

Foster and kinship placements remain Brent's primary provision, accounting for 64.8% of placements. This has reduced to 60% as of March 2025, which did not meet Brent's target of offering 70% of all looked after children's placements through stable, family-based care. However, the continued reliance and need for secure units (0.3%), children's residential homes (7.2%) and supported accommodation (9.8%) (data is all snapshots from March 2025), highlights the necessity to further expand foster care capacity, both short term to accommodation children who come into care in crisis, but may not need to remain in crisis and also for children with complex needs to reduce the reliance on other types of placements.

The average difference in cost of an Independent Fostering Agency compared to an in-house foster care in the 2024/25 financial year was around £630 per placement. This difference is further exacerbated when a fostering placement (either in house or independent) cannot be found and a residential placement is required which puts significant strain on Council budgets. This has become more prevalent due to the number of complex and older children requiring a placement. There have been a number of projects to increase sufficiency which commenced under the previous sufficiency strategy and will continue and potentially further develop under this new strategy.

### **Growing the number of in-house foster carers workstream**

Brent put in place during the last year of the previous strategy, a workstream overseen by the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Community Development to combat the reduction of in-house foster carers by encouraging the increase in the number of new foster carers and the retention of all carers. The workstream reviewed the current offer to in-house foster carers and the following recommendations were implemented:

- Weekly rate uplift: Brent aligned its payments with the North-West London average as of 2024/2025, and this uplift was completed over two financial years.
- Digital offer: laptops are offered to foster carers to help with the various administrative tasks relating to their placements.
- Additional benefits: mental health and wellbeing support through a universal training offer are provided as well as discounted shopping and leisure activities.
- Brent achieved Foster Friendly status on 13 June 2024, the Fostering Network has feedback that Brent is exceeding the minimum criteria for being “fostering friendly”.

### **The West London Fostering Hub**

In September 2023 Brent, alongside Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham (acting as the lead LA), Harrow and Hillingdon, Hounslow, Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster Councils, were successful in securing DfE funding to deliver a regional fostering recruitment hub which is overseen by the Commissioning Alliance. This is called the West London Fostering Hub and has with a dedicated webpage entry point for enquiries. This went live in May 2024.

The increase to Brent’s fostering allowances ensured its fostering offer was comparable to neighbours, allowing the West London coalition to compete with IFAs in a unified way. However, as other LA’s adjust their fostering allowances in future financial years, Brent’s will also need to remain under regular review.

The hub has enabled resources to be amalgamated, and the sharing of best practice and consistent messaging has strengthened Brent’s fostering presence. The hub is also designed to provide support to foster carers enhancing Brent’s offer and increasing retention. This will support Brent’s target of recruiting a net gain of ten new carers at the end of the 2025/26 financial year.

### **The Mockingbird Model**

In addition to the West London Fostering Hub, available DfE funding was also used to implement the Mockingbird model in Brent. This is an extended family model where constellations are created with a hub carer and multiple fostering families. Hub carers were recruited in November 2024, and the first constellation launched in May 2025. The hub carers are specifically trained to provide support to foster carers in numerous ways encouraging retention of foster carers and a

community wrapped around the children. The Positive Support Group also provide bespoke training to foster carers on a range of topics to build resilience in foster carers, particularly for those with more complex and older children. At the time of writing this strategy nine Mockingbird foster carers are undergoing this training.

### **Kinship Local Offer**

Brent has a long-standing commitment to kinship care. Since 2007, it has operated a dedicated Kinship Care Team, established in recognition of the unique needs of kinship families and the importance of a tailored, specialist response. Over the past two decades, Brent has embedded a family-first approach, consistently prioritising the identification and support of family and friend carers wherever it is safe and appropriate to do so.

In February 2023, the Department for Education published *Stable Homes, Built on Love* in response to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care. This set out the government's vision for transforming children's social care, underpinned by a £200 million investment to shift the system towards earlier, more supportive, and preventative interventions. Kinship care was identified as a central priority with a focus on strengthening support for kinship carers and extended family networks.

Building on this foundation, the then government launched *Championing Kinship Care: The National Kinship Care Strategy*, which outlines a long-term commitment to reforming kinship care to ensure more children can remain safely within their family networks. The current government has maintained this direction, culminating in the publication of updated statutory guidance in October 2024: *Kinship Care: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities*. This guidance replaces the previous *Family and Friends Care* guidance and mandates that all local authorities publish a Kinship Local Offer, detailing the support available to kinship carers in their area.

Brent is in the process of refreshing its Kinship Local Offer, in line with the new guidance. This offer will reflect both existing strengths and ambitions for continuous improvement. To support this, the Kinship Care Team has reviewed its practice against the key principles of the Kinship Practice Guide, which summarises the needs, experiences, and preferences of kinship carers across the UK. This review has informed the development of a local Kinship Action Plan, which sets out how Brent will enhance its services and ensure that interventions are accessible, acceptable, and effective for kinship families.

## **Residential Care**

Brent is a member of the Commissioning Alliance and uses their Dynamic Purchasing Vehicle (DPV) to commission residential provision, though over the last couple of years of the strategy, providers are electing to not join the alliance and placements are made through spot purchase arrangements. The local authority has managed a residential short break unit for children with disabilities since 2013. The unit is Ofsted registered and graded as *Good* in its most recent inspection in April 2025.

During the lifetime of the previous strategy the average cost of a residential placement has increased year on year as shown in table 4. It should be noted that due to the range in costs of a residential placement and whether they do or do not include additional staffing, means the average can be easily skewed. The lack of available secure unit placements nationally also increases the cost of residential placements.

**Table 4 – average cost of a residential placement in Brent**

|   | 2021/22   | 2022/23   | 2023/24   | 2024/25   |
|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| <b>Average Residential Placement Cost</b> | £4,866.67 | £5,751.96 | £6,446.99 | £6,451.40 |

As of March 2024, only 6% of children’s homes in England were in London, compared to 25% in the North West. The demand for children’s homes in London is reflected in that it had the highest proportional growth (24%) of the number of settings (43) from April 2023 to March 2024, the next highest was the South East with 14% proportional growth.<sup>13</sup>

### **Reviews of the top 10 highest cost Placements**

In January 2025, all 33 London local authorities participated in a survey to analyse the top 10 highest-cost placements, aiming to better understand the profile and needs of London’s high-cost cohort. The findings revealed that the average cost of a high-needs placement across London was £10,816, with Brent’s average at the time being £12,295 indicating a higher-than-average expenditure.

Notably, when looking at the highest costing placement in each borough all but one were commissioned through spot purchasing, highlighting both the reactive nature of placement sourcing and a move away from frameworks by providers. Furthermore, all but two boroughs cited the absence of a secure children’s home placement as the primary reason for commissioning these high-cost alternatives. Since 2023, there has been a 23% increase in the annual cost of the top 10 placements across London, underscoring the growing financial pressure on local authorities.

Of the 325 placements analysed (with the City of London providing data on its top five), 22% of children were diagnosed with autism spectrum condition or another neurodiverse condition, while 21% presented with complex needs not otherwise specified. These figures reflect the increasing complexity of the cohort and the urgent need for more tailored, specialist provision across the capital.

It is important to recognise this data represents a snapshot in time and is subject to rapid change through the entry into care of a single child into care or the escalation of support needs for an existing placement. This volatility presents ongoing challenges for local authorities in both securing appropriate placements and forecasting budgetary requirements with accuracy. Therefore, the top ten highest cost placements in Brent are kept under regular review.

### **Brent’s Children’s Residential Home**

Brent will open its own children’s residential home in 2025. This will deliver a four-bed residential step-down home within Brent for looked after adolescents (aged 11 – 17) with social, emotional and behavioural needs. The home will focus on young people who need support to successfully re-integrate into their home community, providing access to local services and helping the transition towards independence whilst being closer to their family and friend networks. One bedroom will be available for emergencies.

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<sup>13</sup> [Main findings: children’s social care in England 2024 - GOV.UK](#)

The home will follow Brent's practice framework, enabling greater connection with social work services within the Children, Young People and Community Development directorate. The home will enable young people to maintain their networks providing stability, reduce the number of young people living outside of the borough, and reduce the average cost of residential placements.

### **Pan London Secure Children's Home Project**

In December 2022, Brent Cabinet provided agreement for Brent Council to join the Pan London Vehicle (PLV) to develop and oversee a London Secure Children's Home to support older children and young people with complex needs including a risk of harming themselves or others. These placements are high cost with more than 20 local authorities in 2022 paying over £20k per week (equivalent to £1 million per year) for individual placements, along with the average distance of a secure unit placement being 192 miles from a young person's home.

Following some unavoidable delays, this Pan London project has recommenced in 2025. Brent has provided agreement in principle to continue to participate in this sufficiency project and awaits further updates and will continue to remain as part of the project as long as it is financially viable to do so. Similarly, to the Brent Children's Residential Home, the London Secure Home will enable young people to remain close to their networks, support education, training and employment and provide consistency.

### **West London Residential Home**

Brent Council has partnered with Hounslow and Ealing to enable Hounslow to submit a successful bid to the DfE in March 2025 for a West London Residential Home as part of the DfE Wave 3 residential home funding. This positive outcome means Hounslow Council are able to develop a six-bedroom residential home for children and young people with complex needs which would be operated by Hounslow Council. Subject to no significant delays, the home could be operational by December 2027 and will provide increased sufficiency of residential placements for children and young people with complex needs closer to their home.



## Care Experienced Young People

As with placements of looked after children, Table 5 shows a snapshot as of 31 March 2024 and the provisional data for 31 March 2025 of the placement profile of care experience young people aged 17-21. The proportion of 17–21-year-olds in suitable accommodation is similar to England, Statistical Neighbours and Outer London. The proportion of this cohort remaining with former foster children is also below the average when compared to statistical neighbours. This can be partly attributed to the lower numbers of in-house foster carers and the number of young people studying at university who are no longer living with their former foster carer.

**Table 5: Placement Profile of Care Experienced Young People Aged 17-21**

|   | <b>Provisional<br/>Brent<br/>March 2025<br/>(%)</b> | <b>Brent<br/>March<br/>2024 (%)</b> | <b>England<br/>March<br/>2024 (%)</b> | <b>Statistical<br/>Neighbours<br/>March 2024<br/>(%)</b> | <b>Outer<br/>London<br/>March<br/>2024 (%)</b> |
|---|---|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Care leavers aged<br/>17-18</b>                    |   |                                     |                                       |  |  |
| Supported accommodation                               | 73  | 62                                  | 35                                    | 52   | 47   |
| Independent living                                    | - *   | -                                   | 9                                     | 5  | 7  |
| Former foster carer                                   | 17  | 15                                  | 17                                    | 20   | 17   |
| Supported lodgings                                    | -   | -                                   | 7                                     | 0  | 3  |
| With parents or relatives                             | -   | -                                   | 12                                    | 9  | 9  |
| In custody  | -   | -                                   | 2                                     | 0  | 3  |
| Other accommodation                                   | -   | -                                   | 12                                    | 9  | 8  |
| Do not have the information                           | -   | 6                                   | 6                                     | 5  | 6  |
| <b>Care leavers aged<br/>19-21</b>                    |   |                                     |                                       |  |  |
| Supported accommodation                               | 64  | 58                                  | 19                                    | 36   | 37   |
| Independent living                                    | 7   | 12                                  | 34                                    | 27   | 28   |
| Former foster carer                                   | 7   | 5                                   | 9                                     | 10   | 8  |
| Supported lodgings                                    | 2   | 3                                   | 4                                     | 3  | 3  |
| With parents or relatives                             | 6   | 3                                   | 11                                    | 7  | 7  |
| In custody  | 6   | 5                                   | 3                                     | 5  | 4  |
| Other accommodation                                   | 4   | 5                                   | 13                                    | 6  | 6  |
| Do not have the information                           | 4   | 9                                   | 7                                     | 6  | 7  |
| <b>Suitability of<br/>Accommodation</b>               |   |                                     |                                       |  |  |
| %17-18-year-olds in accommodation considered suitable | 92  | 89                                  | 91                                    | 92   | 91   |

|   |    |    |    |    |    |
|---|----|----|----|----|----|
| %19-21-year-olds in accommodation considered suitable | 88 | 85 | 88 | 89 | 89 |
|---|----|----|----|----|----|

*\*Where the number of Brent young people is less than 5, a percentage is not provided.*

## Supported Accommodation

Similarly to residential provision, supported accommodation placements are commissioned through the Commissioning Alliance Direct Purchasing Vehicle (DPV) with spot purchasing when necessary. Work is underway by the Commissioning Alliance to develop a new supported accommodation DPV and Brent is an active participant in shaping what this will look like for London Local Authorities. Supported accommodation placements are split between those for young people aged 16 – 17-year-old and for whom placement providers must be registered by Ofsted and who are subject to Ofsted inspections and supported accommodation placements for 18+ care experienced young people which are not regulated by Ofsted.

Brent has a notably higher proportion (62%) of care leavers aged 17 and 18 in supported accommodation, well above the national average of 35%, and higher than both statistical neighbours (52%) and Outer London LAs (47%). No care leavers in this age group are in independent living, which contrasts with national and regional trends.

The higher proportion of care leavers in supported accommodation is partly due to the requirement to provide appropriate support for these young people to meet their needs, and a shortage of foster carers to facilitate 'Staying Put' arrangements. A similar pattern emerges for care leavers aged 19-21, with 58% in supported accommodation, again significantly higher than national (19%) and regional averages. Brent has fewer care leavers in independent living (12%) and with former foster carers (5%) compared to all benchmarks.

The average cost of a supported accommodation placement in March 2024 was £772.14. This cost is not significantly different from 2021 (£718.42) and 2022 (£772.79). March 2023 saw a significant spike at £899.83 which could be attributed to a reaction by providers to the introduction of regulations for provisions accommodating 16-17-year-olds which came into force from April 2023. The reduction in 2024 is likely to be from a combination of the market understanding the true cost of the Ofsted regulations and Placement Team efforts to manage the market and challenge providers to search the market for placements that provided better value for money while maintaining quality.

As outlined in the achievements during the 2020-2024 Sufficiency Strategy, Brent has strengthened its quality assurance approach to ensure there are high standards of supported accommodation provision for its young people.

## Leaving Care and Preparing for Independence

Local authorities, as corporate parents, have a statutory duty to prepare young people for leaving care to enable them to have a successful adult life. This means providing good pathways to independent living to ensure positive outcomes for care leavers, as well as helping them to secure and maintain their own accommodation.

As of March 2025, there were 75 Care Leavers bidding for a social tenancy. Due to the shortage of social housing in Brent, the number of care leavers bidding for properties is continuing to grow in comparison to those receiving a social tenancy. 22 care experienced young people moved into their own tenancy in the 2024/25 financial year. In Brent, this problem has been exacerbated by a high proportion of residents presenting as homeless to the Council which includes an average of 150 families per week thus further reducing the availability of social housing.

A corporate review of Brent's support for care leavers was undertaken in 2023 to realise both immediate and ongoing financial savings against the Care Leaver particular placement budget. This included making changes to organisational culture and practice to widen the scope of and improve the quality and timeliness of care leaver pathways to independence. The below following outcomes have come as a result of the review and a workstream has been created which is overseen by the Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Community Development to better support care leavers to transition into a successful independence at an earlier age.

### **Brent Shared Housing Model**

The Brent Shared House Test and Learn model commissioned an external provider, who is an Ofsted registered supported accommodation provider, to supply a six-bedroom property to house six Brent Care Leavers in a shared house arrangement and delivers 'floating support' to those living in the property.

The intended cohort for the Shared House model is young people who are currently bidding for independent living via the Council's social housing bidding route and for whom this is also a lower cost placement to their previous placement. A small number of support hours are available to them and can vary dependent on the amount required by each individual.

The model enables young people to be ready for independence by moving out of supported accommodation while they bid for their own property and helps to transition them toward independent living. Brent have identified a strong pipeline of Care Leavers who would benefit from the model and there have been no voids.

Brent is expanding this model to a second property which is expected to be operational in the latter part of 2025.

### **Independence Life Skills Programme**

Brent's Independent Life Skills programme for care leavers has been refreshed to better prepare care leavers to move into independent accommodation at an earlier age through learning and demonstrating life skills. The programme targets young people aged 17.5 with the expectation that by the age of 19.5, the majority of care leavers are in their own accommodation.

This builds on the current programme of support to complete the ASDAN life skills assessment and culminates with a residential weekend at the Council-run Outdoor Activity Centre in Hampshire which focuses on real life skills such as basic plumbing, dealing with issues such as a water leak as well as financial management. This has been well received by the 50 young people who attended a weekend in 2024/2025, who reported feeling more confident about living on their own and nearly all have been referred onto Brent's Housing Panel in order to secure a social tenancy.

Settle, a charity focused on supporting for Care Leavers as they leave care, has been commissioned by Brent to support care leavers both through tenancy coaching both pre and post

tenancy with the aim of building the confidence of young people to have their own tenancy and reduce the risk of rent arrears. Settle have been commissioned to work with up to 30 young people until March 2026. There is a focus in the first year of this new strategy in ensuring as many of Brent Care Leavers are supported by Settle.

## **Strategic Housing Pathways for Care Leavers**

Children and Young People colleagues are working in close partnership with Housing colleagues to identify, design and implement innovative exit housing pathways for care leavers. This collaborative effort includes:

- Leveraging Council-owned housing companies: exploring opportunities for i4B and First Wave Housing to acquire properties specifically designated to care leavers and where this is not possible to include care leavers in their strategic business planning for existing properties.
- Adapting the housing bidding process: Reviewing and refining the bidding process to improve access to social housing for young people transitioning from care.
- Engaging the private rented sector: identifying and expanding viable housing options within the private rental market and appropriate support to reduce the likelihood of rent arrears.
- Enhancing communication: developing clear, supportive messaging to help care leavers understand the Council's housing offer and set realistic expectations in the current housing climate.

This integrated approach aims to provide stable, suitable, and sustainable housing solutions that support care leavers in their journey towards independence.

## **The Future of Sufficiency Planning**

As outlined throughout this strategy, local authorities are navigating a complex and evolving landscape in fulfilling their sufficiency duty. The key challenges consist of an increase in the number of complex and older children entering care, the local, regional and national reduction in foster carers and availability of social tenancies to support those ready for independence.

These challenges are set in an uncertain period following changes to external partners, reform following the 2024 general election and the outcome of the 2022 Independent Review of the Children's Social Care. This is also set in a period of great financial pressures for the Local Authority and the ramifications of the Covid 19 pandemic are still being felt and new implications are coming to light. It is clear that local authorities can no longer act in isolation to deliver sufficiency and need to work in partnership at a local, regional and national level.

Due to the complex and evolving landscape affecting the Council's ability to meet its sufficiency duty as outlined throughout this document, this strategy will be reviewed on an annual basis to align with the nationally published data at the end of the calendar year. This will enable the document to be responsive, evidence-based and appropriately adapted to emerging trends and challenges to meet the needs of our children and young people.

## Action Plan

| Provision Type | Action  | Outcome Measure  | End of March 2026 Target   | March 2025 Position                            |
|----------------|---|--|--|--|
| Fostering      | Cooperation with West London authorities on a regional approach to fostering recruitment services and ensuring Brent's weekly rate is aligned and competitive and placements are available for children with a wide range of needs. | Net gain of 10 mainstream foster carer households each financial year  | Net increase of 10 mainstream foster carer households                                  | 44 mainstream foster carer households          |
| Fostering      | Cooperation with West London authorities on a regional approach to fostering recruitment services and ensuring Brent's weekly rate is aligned and competitive and placements are available for children with a wide range of needs. | Percentage of looked after children in a fostering placement   | 70%  | 60%  |
| Fostering      | Explore and expand different types of fostering with current and new carers which include but is not limited to respite and emergency foster carers.  | Increase in the number of foster carers who can be on-call and offer emergency placements of up to a week which includes carers from Brent Council | At least one foster carer available and able to offer an emergency placement each week | One foster carer available per month (or less) |
| Fostering      | Explore and expand different types of fostering with current and new carers which include but is not  | Increase in the number of foster carers who can provide respite to children and young people living with   | 5  | 4  |

|                        |   |   |  |   |
|------------------------|---|---|--|---|
|                        | limited to respite and emergency foster carers.   | in-house foster placements and support with transitions   |  |   |
| Fostering              | Implementation of the Mockingbird Model   | Retention of internal foster carers   | Net increase of 10 mainstream foster carer households                | 44 mainstream foster carer households   |
| Fostering              | Implementation of the Mockingbird Model   | Reduction in the number of 3+ placement moves over 12 months                                      | 12%  | 12%   |
| Fostering              | Conduct surveys with in-house foster carers every 6 months  | Retention of internal foster carers   | 90% foster carers state 'Happy' or 'Very Happy'                      | 6 out 8 respondents (75%) state they are either 'Happy' or 'Very Happy' with Brent's fostering service, 2 stated 'Somewhat Unhappy' |
| Fostering              | Provide a comprehensive training offer to foster carers   | Increase the number of in-house foster carers who can accommodate older and more complex children | 40 internal foster carers have accessed the universal training offer | 6 foster carers accessed the Children in Care Resilience universal training offer   |
| Residential and Secure | Open Brent's Children's Residential Home  | Percentage of looked after children in a residential placement                                    | 8%   | 13%   |
| Residential and Secure | Open Brent's Children's Residential Home  | Percentage of looked after children placed within 20 miles of the borough                         | No less than 80%   | 82%   |
| Residential and Secure | Increase number of young people stepped down to foster placements before the age of 16  | Percentage of looked after children in a fostering placement                                      | 70%  | 60%   |
| Residential and Secure | Ensure young people age 16 – 17 step down from residential into supported accommodation as early as possible and in line with their care/pathway plan | Percentage of looked after children in a residential placement                                    | 8%   | 13%   |

|                        |  |   |  |  |
|------------------------|--|---|--|--|
| Residential and Secure | Ensure young people age 16 – 17 step down from residential into supported accommodation as early as possible and in line with their care/pathway plan  | FTE supported accommodation placements for 16 – 17-year-olds (LAC)        | 60 (additional 10 step down from residential provision)  | 50   |
| Residential and Secure | Participate in current pan-regional and regional projects to increase residential sufficiency, and take advantage of future individual, pan regional and regional activities if financially viable | Percentage of looked after children in a residential placement            | 8%   | 13%  |
| Residential and Secure | Participate in current pan-regional and regional projects to increase residential sufficiency, and take advantage of future individual, pan regional and regional activities if financially viable | Percentage of looked after children placed within 20 miles of the borough | No less than 80%   | 82%  |
| Leaving Care           | Prepare care leavers for independence through Brent's Independence Life Skills Programme   | The number of care leavers approved by the Housing Panel by the age of 20 | 60   | 40   |
| Leaving Care           | Increase the number of exit pathways for care leavers ready for independence through both internal (Council) mechanisms and any available external mechanisms                                      | Number of young people in their own tenancy                               | 25   | 18   |
| All                    | Input of young people is utilised in delivering sufficiency  | Bright Spot Survey Feedback   | Maintain until next survey is conducted and then increase all positive responses by 10% (where possible) | 93% of young people aged 4-17 reported 'always' feeling safe where they lived.<br><br>56% of children aged 8-11 years reported |

|     |  |                          |   |   |
|-----|--|--------------------------|---|---|
|     |  |                          |   | <p>'always' feeling settled where they</p> <p>76% of 11-17 years reported 'always' feeling settled at home.</p> <p>77% of care leavers reported 'always' feeling safe at home</p> |
| All | Increase the number of quality assurance visits conducted and to work with providers who do not meet the expected standards. | Suitability of placement | 25 (Corporate KPI)<br>35 stretch target | 32  |
| All | Quality Assurance visits to include Care Quality Ambassadors   | Number of visits         | 12                                      | 10  |