



1. Introduction

Barnet's Children in Care Council is for all children and young people who have experience of being in care. In Barnet, our children have named their Children in Care Council 'Barnet on Point, #BOP and they meet throughout the year to talk about how they experience the care provided by Barnet. Our children and young people, through involvement with #BOP and with the support of a dedicated participation worker, are provided with opportunities to get involved, make suggestions about how our services and practice can be improved or shaped and provide challenge when things are not working well for them. This report sets out how we have been engaging, listening and acting upon the voice of children and young people in our care during 2023/24.

2. Barnet On Point – Child in Care Council

All children and young people in Barnet's care are automatically 'members' of #BOP and their views are collected through a variety of methods and opportunities. Children are free to decide if they want to opt out or take part informally or in structured #BOP activities. Therefore, active membership fluctuates depending on the ages and stages that young people are at and their interests and circumstances. Our group who undertook much of #BOPs work in 2022/23 have moved on whilst a few remain involved. Our new #BOP group is currently developing and establishing how they want their forum to work with adult guidance. However, we have some young people with more confidence or experience who are willing to support leadership-based activities who we can call upon.

#BOP offers a range of activities to take part in; these activities are social and allow children and young people to meet others in similar circumstances and helps us find ways they can take part in the wider running of the services delivered to them.

Below are some of the highlights of the last year.

In June/July 2023 we offered a 4-week football project to our Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking young people culminating in the chance to play against a team of staff and foster carers. Nine young people took part and received a certificate and voucher from Chris Munday, our Director of Children's Services (DCS) to acknowledge their attendance. Sadly, for the staff team, they lost 10-0!

The project was designed to replicate an everyday experience for young people of taking part in sport with parent figures watching and was attended by Chris and other senior leaders and staff who cheered on and enjoyed the "competition".



Barnet's annual summer celebration was held on 1 August 2023 and attended by the Mayor, the Lead Member for Children, and approximately 200 people including 71 children and young people, their carers, families, and Family Services staff. The theme of this year's event was expanded from Belonging to Inclusion with a particular emphasis on welcoming those in our LGBTQ+ community and disabled children. This was done using Pride bunting and curating activities to increase accessibility to children with physical and learning disabilities and/or neurodiversity.

The theme was further extended by displaying international flags and catering for a range of dietary needs including Kosher. The Caribbean and African food was a particular highlight.

The event followed tradition with an achievement's ceremony presented for the first time by three young people. To be as inclusive as possible for our younger children and neurodiverse children the ceremony was divided into a quiet/quick and loud/long section. Each child received a certificate of recognition for their achievements over the year and this remains a popular element of the event. For the rest of the day the children and young

people enjoyed music, face painting, crafting, inflatables, an under 5's and chill out zone, ice-cream and a gaming bus. We closed the event with a cake cutting ceremony and singing led by one of our life-story practitioners and our DCS!



We were delighted that feedback from children and adults was positive including that the adjustments made to accommodate disabled children were improved and successful. Our Barnet Integrated Clinical Service (BICS) set up and ran a chill out area with a range of sensory and touch based play activities. For example, the bucket of orbies was a real hit!



Feedback about one young person's experience summed up the day:

"It was such a lovely moment for B. It was a super boost for his confidence. It was a brilliant event. All the young people were so proud of themselves, and it was such a privilege to celebrate their achievements".

Children's social worker.

In September 2023 #BOP hosted a staff training session on the needs of LGBTQ+ young people in care which was well attended by 25 staff. This was prompted, in part, to the "coming out" of one young person to his social worker during the summer event after seeing

the Pride flag. It was a valuable reminder that visible cues representing inclusion and belonging facilitate young people feeling able to be themselves. The training focused on some recent research into the experiences of young LGBTQ+ children in care (they are overrepresented) and what professionals can do to support them, including the sharing of resources. We have since developed a #BOP Pride sticker and badge for staff to use on lanyards and laptops.

Two young #BOP members were part of our interview panel to recruit our new Participation Officer. They developed their own questions for the process and interviewed and gave feedback. They did this extremely professionally and endorsed our new officer, Laura, as a good choice.

Seven young people entered our annual winter card competition held jointly with Live Unlimited our charity for Barnet's children in care. The Family Services design is below and featured several of the entries received.



In February 2024 half-term we ran two trampolining sessions attended by twelve children. Whilst this activity was primarily a chance for social fun, during lunch, the children naturally and without prompting discussed their personal experiences of being in care, talking about contact with their birth families and how long they have lived with their carers. This highlights the value of the wider opportunities that #BOP and the Independent Reviewing Officers activity days provide for our children to connect with one another that they may not be able to share with their peers who live with their birth families. One older young person fed back they would like to go trampolining every day!

In March 2024 #BOP and two participation officers accompanied a young person to attend an open event at Cambridge University. Our young person was astonished at the support on offer for care experienced young people who attend Cambridge. This includes funded accommodation all year round and a package of additional help that makes aspiring to

study at Cambridge a goal that can be achieved by young people from all backgrounds. Our young person shared “it is very different to what I am used to which is inspiring. I want to go to Cambridge and am ready to work hard to make it happen”. As well as the welcome Cambridge offered the journey there and back provided a chance to talk, share experiences and reflect.



During March we started the first of a series of quarterly “Lundy Briefings”. (The Lundy Model informs our approach to participation and is outlined here [My Say Matters strategy | Barnet Council](#)). These briefings, hosted by the Children in Care service for all Corporate Parenting staff and co-delivered with our #BOP participation officer, are a chance to make sure feedback from young people is shared, acted on and embedded. During the first session we recapped on feedback given by young people in 2023. This included asking us not to call their homes a “placement”, checking with young people about their availability before arranging meetings and making sure they don’t have to collect their social worker from reception at school.

This feedback was also shared more widely by our Virtual School at a Conference on Trauma Informed approaches, on 21st March 2024, for Barnet school staff. This is to ensure that our children’s feedback is shared as widely as possible with partners and agencies who can act on the feedback in their own settings. This contributes to children feeling they have influence on the professional networks involved with them, – in particular Barnet schools can act on the feedback around educational settings.

Lundy Briefings will continue as a dedicated space to reflect together as a service on feedback from young people and plan further opportunities for participation and coproduction.

A planned Tea with the Mayor has been postponed from April to October 2024 to maximise opportunities for children and young people to attend. This was a popular activity last year in

which the children and young people enjoyed a robe show and presentation about the history of Barnet. A chance to meet the mayor and understand the context of civic life and citizenship is a way in which we as a council can reinforce our corporate parenting duty.

#BOP secured 50 heavily discounted tickets for the musical Frozen on 25 April which Live Unlimited funded. This has allowed children to attend with their foster families, including siblings living in different households, promoting a sense of family, and belonging. We have had positive feedback including the comment below:

“The show was amazing, D really enjoyed it even more so as he is taking GCSE drama and has never been to the theatre. His actual words were “I can see myself on that stage”.

Barnet Foster Carer

Barnet Family Services has three established children’s homes in Barnet and children and young people are routinely included in exploring how they would like their environment to look so it feels welcoming to the young people living there. This collaboration includes artwork, furnishings and the gardens. For example, a new Children’s home, Egerton House, was opened in October 2023 and the young person identified for this home planned the decoration of his bedroom as part of his transition. This model of co-producing what the young person’s safe and personal space will look like helps them to feel they have some influence over their living environment as a home and not a ‘placement’.

#BOP are developing an ongoing video project which will be presented, alongside this report, at Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 6 June 2024. This is an opportunity for children and young people in our care to share their experiences and learn new skills in a creative way using narrative and video techniques.

Children taking part come from a range of backgrounds and have the chance to share aspects of their care journey and those that helped them along the way.

3. Conclusion and Forward Plan

‘My Say Matters’ and the offer to children in our care via #BOP is underpinned by the Lundy Model of which an important element is the right not to take part. This work is not of interest to all our children, but we provide a varied offer which enables children and young people who do want to participate to do so in a meaningful, accessible way.

'My Say Matters' and meaningful participation is now an embedded way of working. The approach has visibility across the council, within the partnership and strong networks of support for all children in Barnet. There is a thriving culture of coproduction and participation with our children and young people.

Next Steps include:

- We will continue to champion children in our care via #BOP and aim to encourage as many young people as we can to take part by offering a broader range of activities as chosen by them (including social events and the Summer Celebration).
- We want to further develop the opportunity for children in our care to influence service delivery in partnership with managers and practice leaders.
- This year's Summer Celebration has "Influence" as its theme and this will be reflected in the activities on the day including further chances to offer feedback on service delivery and get involved with #BOP.
- We will continue to support quarterly "Lundy Briefings" with our Corporate Parenting Service to strengthen our feedback loops and ensure the views of children and young people are fed back to the children's workforce, and their engagement is active in supporting our children in our care to attend #BOP.
- We will work in partnership with our Corporate Parenting Service to ensure the voices of our children and young people are acted on in all areas of service development and staff service events. This will include focus on those with protected characteristics e.g. children with a disability and young people in our LGBT+ community.

Liz Shaw, Practice and Learning Manager 29 April 2024