

Corporate Parenting in the City of London

Annual Report – 2019/20

1 Introduction and context

- 1.1 This annual report provides an update on the City of London Corporation's role as a Corporate Parent, and the outcomes that have been achieved for the children in our care during 2019/20.
- 1.2 The City of London Corporation (City Corporation) is a Corporate Parent to the children who are in its care. These looked after children are those children and young people aged 0 – the eve of their 18th birthday who cannot safely remain with their family, or those for whom the City Corporation acts as a parent in the absence of family. Children Looked After (CLA) can include Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC), children with multiple disabilities and those who have suffered abuse and/or neglect. As such, looked after children and young people are one of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in our community.
- 1.3 The City Corporation's legal and financial responsibility to the children and young people for whom it is a corporate parent extends into their lives as care leavers and as they transition to independence.
- 1.4 The City Corporation's Children's Services were inspected by Ofsted in March 2020, with the findings published in June 2020. The service was found to be overall 'Outstanding' with Ofsted through its independent evaluation finding that Corporate Parenting within the City is 'very strong, and there is a high commitment throughout the service to ensuring a personalised response to individual need'. As the report was published in June 2020, Ofsted's findings and recommendations fall outside the scope of this report.

2 The children in our care

- 2.1 At the end of the reporting period in March 2020, the City Corporation had a total of 24 children and young people under the age of 18 who were being looked after by the local authority. 92% of those coming into care this year were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC).
- 2.2 In total 21 children and young people ceased to be children in care and of these 48% had also come into care during 2019-20. No children and young people were transferred to the services of other local authorities via the National Transfer Scheme; none were transferred to the services of the National Asylum Support Service and none were returned to the care of their parent under a supervision order.
- 2.3 The City Corporation's looked after children are predominantly older. 89% of the children cared for during the year were 15 years or older, and 88% of the young people coming into care during the year were at least 16 years old as of 31 March 2020. None were younger than 15 years.

- 2.4 The City Corporation's looked after children are predominately male. 92% (22 of 24) of children in care at 31 March 2020 were male.
- 2.5 The ethnicity of the City Corporation's looked after children are predominately Black African, with 64% of the total number from this ethnicity grouping.

3 Corporate Parenting Board (Safeguarding Sub-Committee)

- 3.1 Within the City Corporation the function of the Corporate Parenting Board is undertaken by the Safeguarding Sub-Committee which reports to the Community and Children's Services Committee.
- 3.2 The Safeguarding Sub-Committee meets four times each year, and in its capacity as the Corporate Parenting Board it is responsible for:
 - achieving improved outcomes for children in care and care leavers;
 - developing and overseeing implementation of the City Corporation's Corporate Parenting Strategy to drive improved outcomes;
 - providing challenge to ensure that the City Corporation's duties as Corporate Parent are carried out effectively and consistently.
- 3.3 Membership includes the Chairman of Community and Children's Services Committee. Over the past year the Sub-Committee has considered reports on topics including:
 - Looked after children's health annual report
 - Children Missing from Care, Home and Education
 - Children in Care Council (CiCC) and Participation Service update
 - City of London Sufficiency Strategy update
 - Children's social care COVID-19 response
 - Modern Day Slavery Action Plan
 - Quality Assurance Framework
 - Virtual school for looked after children
- 3.4 The Sub-Committee also formally received the Annual Report of the City and Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership and Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) Annual Report.
- 3.5 The City Corporation launched the Achieving Excellence Board (AEB) for Children's Social Care in January 2020, with its inaugural meeting held on the 14th of January. The principle roles of the AEB are to:
 - Help drive the transition to excellence and to sustain excellent practice.
 - Seek to identify any early signs where the quality of practice might be slipping so that remedial action is taken swiftly.
 - Celebrate excellence.
 - Be relentless in focusing on impact and outcomes by focusing on the 'so what' and 'how do we know' questions.
 - Develop mature working relationships so that respectful challenge is seen as an essential part of conducting our business, in and out of meetings

- Engage all staff in the work of the AEB.
- Mirror the use of systemic practice in its operation to help understand the interplay of relationships with services.
- Interrogate performance and use this to evaluate progress and identify areas for development.
- Support the establishment of a strong culture to achieving excellence in practice.

4 Corporate Parenting Strategy

- 4.1 The Corporate Parenting Strategy sets out the City Corporation's commitment to ensure that children who are looked after have the support, care and encouragement to reach their full potential. The Service Improvement Plan for 2019-2020 included objectives for children in care and care leavers.
- 4.2 To achieve this, and deliver the City Corporation's roles and responsibilities as a corporate parent the plan included new actions such as:
- Recruiting a Deputy Team Manager to chair first Child in Need meetings
 - All frontline staff and managers to undertake refresher contextual safeguarding training
 - Care leavers to have practice opportunities managing finances
 - Pathway plans are written with the young person, and include health, keywork and educational input post-18
 - Young people in care and care leavers know what they are entitled to
 - Leaving Care Guidance booklet to be used by young people
 - Every young person knows about advocacy service
 - Welcome pack to include the purpose of different meetings, photos of workers and their roles
 - Improve the mental health and wellbeing of UASC looked after children
 - Children in Care Council knows about mental health support
 - Semi-independent accommodation is safe and of good quality
 - Children in care receive timely good quality health provision

5 The Children in Care Council (CiCC)

- 5.1 The City Corporation's Children in Care Council (CiCC) was established in November 2014. The CiCC meets six times a year in each holiday and half term period.
- 5.2 During the year, the CiCC welcomed several guests including The Town Clerk who joined a consultation session on housing and accommodation, The Director of Community & Children's Services and Deputy Chair of the Community & Children's Services Committee. The CiCC also welcomed several external guest speakers on subjects such as sexual health and positive relationships and personal safety.
- 5.3 Tempo time credits have continued to be used to acknowledge members' participation, although it is not always straightforward to find opportunities to spend the credits.

- 5.4 Participation means more than the 'formal' meeting; they are generally followed by an activity which enables informal time together and which is valued by CiCC members.
- 5.5 The CiCC Chair, a young person elected by their peers, changed in the year as the previous chair moved on into independence, the Chair position was shared by three young people taking into account their availability and to give those interested an opportunity to learn the skills of chairing meetings. The CiCC Chair and Vice Chair will be re-elected in 2021.
- 5.6 The main issues addressed together during the year included:
- Keeping safe – information and discussion on personal safety when out and about;
 - Preparation for entering the world of work;
 - Supporting the recruitment of the new Participation Officer
 - Discussion and consultation on pathway plans and changing the approach, introducing 'Mind of My Own' as a potential tool;
 - Contributing to the City's children and young people's plan
 - Learning and discussion on preparing for living independently, what to expect and budgeting
 - Continuing with the participation in Whitehall Takeover Days – joining a government department and shadowing a minister for the day
 - Participation in the new London-wide Children in Care Council.
 - Developing the CiCC WhatsApp group and having break out conversation groups to enable the young people to practice their English.
- 5.7 Activities together during the past year have included:
- A week at an outward-bound centre in Scotland in Summer 2019. 12 young people travelled by train and then embarked on an active week, including hill walking, walking down a river, caving, canoeing, climbing, and a day on the beach playing cricket, football and swimming. Everyone was presented with a certificate of achievement at the end of the week before travelling back to London.
 - Bowling
 - Lunch at Nando's
 - Cinema trip
 - Boat trip on Thames
 - Exploring London's South Bank
 - Ice skating

- 5.8 The CiCC reviewed the welcome pack for newcomers which every young person receives; a backpack containing essential items for the first days as well as information sheets outlining The Pledge and opportunities available to them.
- 5.9 The Pledge is the Corporation's promise to provide the care and help that children and young people in its care have told the City Corporation they want in order to thrive – and sits within the Corporate Parenting Strategy. The Pledge was reviewed by the CiCC during the year and feedback offered to the Safeguarding Sub-Committee
- 5.10 The CiCC is represented at the Youth Programme Board and a member of the team attends meetings and reports back to CiCC meetings

6 Health and wellbeing

- 6.1 As a corporate parent the City Corporation takes responsibility for assessing and promoting good physical and mental health among the children and young people in our care. This is achieved through annual assessments of health and dental health, and by ensuring children and young people are fully immunised. The City Corporation's performance in achieving health and dental assessments and immunisations exceeds national performance.
- 6.2 During 2019/20 all 24 children who remained in the City's care for more than one week received their statutory health assessment. Discounting the UASC who removed themselves from our services within one week, every child who came into care in the year received their initial medical assessment by a paediatrician and all those who had been in care 12 or more months received their annual review by the LAC health nurse. The latest reported national figures show that 90% of children were looked after for at least 12 months had had an annual health assessment in 2019-20.¹
- 6.3 All children looked after by the City Corporation at 31 March 2020 had up-to-date immunisations or were in the process of undertaking the UASC Booster programme at year end.
- 6.4 Annual dental checks were conducted during the year for all those who were in care at the start of the year, compared to nationally reported performance of 90% for those who had been in care nationally for at least 12 months at 31 March 2020.
- 6.5 No child in care was identified as having a substance misuse issue. For reference, the national average for those who had been in care for at least 12 months at 31 March 2020 was 3% and the inner London average was 7%.
- 6.6 All children in our care received their health histories in 2019-2020 which was a previous Ofsted recommendation. Health histories contain a summary of a young person's overall health and is provided just before their 18th birthday.

¹ Children looked after in England, year ending 31 March 2017 SFR 50/2017.

7 Safeguarding our children

- 7.1 All our looked after children and young people leaving care are allocated a fully qualified social worker. Social workers offer support in areas such as identity, health, leisure, education and friendship.
- 7.2 The City Corporation's Children's Social Care Team has expanded during 2019-20 due to a large increase of young people entering the service. Due to an increased number of front-line staff, a good quality of safeguarding and case load was maintained as increasing capacity in the service has had a positive effect on safeguarding vulnerable children.
- 7.3 The Children's Social Care service went through a full systemic social work course together in 2019-20 to improve all aspects of practice, supervision and leadership, as well as increasing the use of evidence-based systemic ideas and practices. There was also a further session on risk management.
- 7.4 There were eight referrals made to the Local Authorities Designated Officer (LADO) during 2019-20, an increase of two from 2018-19. Of those eight referrals, five met the threshold for the LADO and three did not, due to insufficient evidence to support the allegation. The City Corporation received no complaints from the children or young people in its care or its care leavers.
- 7.5 Over the year, 5 UASC, aged between 16 to 17 years-old, went missing from their placements, with a total of 12 episodes between them. All within our care returned from their missing episodes. Of the 12 missing episodes: 9 returned within 24 hours, one returned within 48 hours and two were missing from between two-six weeks.
- 7.6 Children who go missing can be at risk of serious harm. There are concerns about the vulnerability of missing or runaway children to sexual exploitation or other exploitative harm such as violence, crime, gang exploitation or drug and alcohol misuse. Looked after children who go missing from placements are at particular risk and vulnerable to sexual and other exploitation. Therefore, the children in the City Corporation's care who went missing were considered vulnerable to Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and were reviewed by the Multi Agency Sexual Exploitation Group. This resulted in vulnerability factors being addressed in case planning and multi-agency meetings.
- 7.7 Specialist therapeutic services such as Freedom from Torture have been utilised to provide the young people with appropriate emotional support. The Service Manager for children and families also commissioned a new mental health provision in partnership with Coram and the City of London Family Therapy Training Clinic, jointly run with Kings College London which will be rolled out during 2020-21.

8 Education and employment

- 8.1 The Virtual School Head (VSH) reports on education and employment of our children looked after and care leavers on an annual basis following the educational year. The report covering 2019-20 academic year is due in February 2021

- 8.2 At the end of the 2019-20 academic year, there were a total of 56 young people enrolled at the Virtual School; 41 in at school, college or university; 6 taking part in tuition classes; 3 in work or training; 5 recorded as not in employment, education or training (NEET); and 1 recorded as missing.
- 8.3 The overwhelming majority of children in care and care leavers have excellent attendance at all education enrichment classes, and engagement with learning is high. This is reflected in the half year attendance figure in February 2020 being 91.7%, after which the national lockdown started.
- 8.4 The City Corporation ensures that children in care and care leavers have opportunities to explore the arts, culture and sport. In 2019-20, young people had the opportunity of an extended enrichment programme in partnership with the City of London School which supports better outcomes for our UASC students
- 8.5 In 2019, 37% of looked after children reached the expected standard in the headline measure reading, writing and maths, which is much lower than the 65% for non-looked after children. However, 58% of looked after children at the end of key stage 2 have a special educational need (SEN) identified, as do 49% of children in need. In comparison, only 18% of non-looked after children have a SEN nationally.

9 Assessments, case planning and permanency planning

- 9.1 The City Corporation's internal audits have shown that assessments during 2019/20 are thorough and reflect diversity, inclusion and the complex family situations that families may live in.
- 9.2 Smart case planning has been delivered throughout 2019/20 and has been improved by the addition of a Deputy Team Manager to the staff structure, and by mid-2019 all Child in Need meetings were chaired by the new Deputy Team Manager to add robustness.
- 9.3 Permanency planning meetings during 2019-20 have been chaired by the Assistant Director for People Services and Public Law Outline and care proceedings were tracked as part of these meetings.
- 9.4 In 2019/20, care proceedings were concluded with a permanency plan for adoption for two children approved by court with Placement Orders granted. Children continued to be matched with their foster carers in the long term and children's Staying Put arrangements post-18 were confirmed for Looked After Children.
- 9.5 Celebrations for young people were held in 2019-20 that were well attended by Looked After Children, elected Members, the Virtual School Headteacher and the Social Care service at Tower Bridge.

10 IRO service

- 10.1 The Independent Reviewing Officer's (IRO) statutory task is to ensure that the care plan for the child fully reflects the child's needs and that the actions set out in the plan are consistent with the local authority's legal responsibilities towards the child. There

is one full time IRO who is responsible for carrying out the functions of the role to all children in the care of the City Corporation.

- 10.2 The IRO sits away from the Children's Social Care Team and is not involved in the preparation of the child's care plan, management of the child's case, or the control over resources to ensure their independence.
- 10.3 The Children's Social Care Team notifies the IRO of all children received into care within 72 hours. The IRO conducted over 60 visits to meet children in the last 2 years. The purpose of these visits was to introduce the role of the IRO to newly accommodated children and in all cases to consult children and monitor the quality and progress of their care.
- 10.4 The IRO service has continued to go from strength to strength in 2019-20, and below lists some of the notable achievements during the year:
 - Consistent participation of children in their review meetings
 - All children seen alone by the IRO outside of review meetings
 - Active monitoring of children's care plans and needs between review periods
 - Design and implementation of independent skills checklist
 - Review minutes, contacts and alerts recorded on children's files within the ICS workflow
 - The promotion of the Children's Right services, seeing a significant increase in advocacy and independent visiting service
 - The continuation of review meetings between the IRO, Virtual School Head and Children Looked After Designated Nurse
 - 2nd IRO in post, focusing on needs of care leavers

11 Accommodation

- 11.1 Stable and caring home environments help children in care. Children looked after benefit from living with foster carers and are placed with independent fostering agencies judged Good or Outstanding by Ofsted. Foster placements are carefully commissioned on an individual basis in order to meet the needs of children and young people and these arrangements are systematically monitored to ensure they provide stable placements that meet the physical, emotional and social needs of children. The Quality Assurance Manager now reviews placements with the fostering agencies. Semi-independent accommodation will be considered based on the young person's needs, wishes and feelings, and any risk identified. Foster care will always be the starting position.
- 11.2 The City Corporation has an outstanding Quality Assurance Framework and an effective Placement Panel which is chaired by the Assistant Director for People, which prioritises placement stability and the quality of accommodation procurement.
- 11.3 When it is feasible, our LAC are placed as close to the City as possible. Although the City Corporation did not have any sibling groups within its care cohort during 2019/20, wherever it is appropriate to do so, siblings that are looked after are placed together.
- 11.4 With regards to placement stability, of the 24 children looked after as of 31 March 2020, 15 were newly accommodated UASC in 2019-20. UASC are often initially placed

under time pressure often with little information about the child and their needs, abilities and risks. They are often, therefore, subject to placement changes within the first few months. As so many of our Children in Care are UASC, placement instability is a challenge for us.

11.5 Of those who had been in care as of 1st April 2019: all three had remained in stable foster placements throughout the year.

11.6 A whole year total of 41 children that were looked after during this period required accommodation due to being unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) and in each of these cases, they were received into care under S.20 and appropriately remained looked after under this legal status throughout the year. 11 UASC became care leavers upon reaching the age of 18 during this reporting year and are being supported by the City Corporation accordingly.

11.7 Of the 24 children in care at the end of the reporting year, 15 are in foster placements and 9 children are in a semi-independent provision.

12 Areas of development and priorities for the year ahead

12.1 The Corporate Parenting Strategy sets out the City Corporation's commitment to ensuring the children in and leaving its care meet their full potential and have lives in which they thrive. We will continue to drive the achievement of this in 2020/21 through continuing and enhanced services and the delivery of targeted actions, some of which have been affected and influenced by the Covid-19 pandemic. These include:

- The management overview of families stepped down to Early Help to ensure families receive help in a timescale that is right for them
- The recording of management decision making of a child's journey through services
- Staff are able to support children and families through experiences of racism
- Mental Health of UASC, local children and families is supported, and trauma reduced
- Mind of My Own Application is used by all Social Workers and Early Help workers
- Young people are well informed about the Covid-19 pandemic and are able to follow Public Health England guidelines
- Face to face visits are resumed where safe to do so
- Achieving Excellence Board Chairman to review data and improve reporting
- Children and Young People have a good knowledge of the complaints and advocacy process
- Families and parents are well engaged through clear consistent communication
- Improve the confidence of Looked After Children with money and improve the employability support offer
- Support Children and Young People with their immigration status and recognise immigration status as a barrier to good health
- Improve staff awareness of The Pledge.