

Corporate Parenting in the City of London

Annual Report – 2022/23

1 Introduction and context

- 1.1 This annual report updates on the City of London Corporation's (the Corporation) role as a Corporate Parent, and the outcomes that have been achieved for the children in our care during April 2022 to March 2023.
- 1.2 The Corporation is a Corporate Parent to the children in its care. These looked after children are those aged 0 to the eve of their 18th birthday who cannot safely remain with their family, or those for whom the Corporation acts as a parent in the absence of family. Children in Care (CiC) 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 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 Corporation's Children's Services received a focus visit to inspect the Corporation's arrangements for the 'front door' in November 2022. This found 'high-quality practice which ensures that children benefit from effective and responsive front door services'. This builds on Ofsted's full visit in 2020 which found the service to be overall 'Outstanding', finding that the Corporation's corporate parenting is 'very strong, and there is a high commitment throughout the service to ensuring a personalised response to individual need'.
- 1.5 This report highlights how the Corporation has supported our CiC and care leavers over the past year.

2 The children in our care

- 2.1 At the end of the reporting period in March 2023 the Corporation had a total of 9 children and young people under the age of 18 who were being looked after by the local authority, including 6 UASC (67%). Ten children came into care during the year.
- 2.2 In total 11 children and young people ceased to be CiC and of these 3 had also come into care during 2022-23.
- 2.3 One young person was transferred to the services of other local authorities via the National Transfer Scheme. Due to the work of the social care team, this young person experienced no change of home, meaning they experienced a continuity of care minimising the potential negative impact to the young person.
- 2.4 The Corporation's CiC are predominately male; 77% (7 of 9) of CiC up to 31 March 2023.

- 2.5 The majority of the Corporation's CiC are Black African: 44% of all those in care (4 of 9).
- 2.6 The Corporation has one CiC and one care leaver who are subject to an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).
- 2.7 No Final Adoption orders were granted during this year.

3 Corporate Parenting Board (Safeguarding Sub-Committee)

- 3.1 Within the Corporation, the function of the Corporate Parenting Board is undertaken by the Safeguarding Sub-Committee. This reports to the Community and Children's Services Committee.
- 3.2 The Safeguarding Sub-Committee, which includes the Chairman of Community and Children's Services Committee, meets four times each year and, in its capacity as the Corporate Parenting Board, is responsible for:
 - Achieving improved outcomes for CiC and care leavers.
 - Developing and overseeing implementation of the Corporation's Corporate Parenting Strategy to drive improved outcomes.
 - Providing challenge to ensure that the Corporation's duties as Corporate Parent are carried out effectively and consistently.
- 3.3 Over the past year the Sub-Committee has considered reports on topics including:
 - Participation Service – Children in Care Council (CiCC), updated CiCC Pledge and summer activities.
 - Pan-London Children in Care Council.
 - Youth Offending Service Inspection Report and Action Plan.
 - Corporate Safeguarding Policy.
 - Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report.
 - Children's Social Care Self Evaluation and Service Development Plan.
 - Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2019/20 and Corporate Parenting Strategy Update.
 - Virtual School Headteacher Annual Report 2021/22 and Virtual School Development Plan 2022/23.
 - Action for Children Survey 2022.
 - Care leavers and their education, training and employment.
 - Ofsted Focus Visit Inspection of Children's Social Care and Early Help.
- 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.

4 Corporate Parenting Strategy and Service Development Plan

- 4.1 The Corporate Parenting Strategy sets out the Corporation's commitment to ensuring that CiC and care leavers have the support, care and encouragement they need to reach their full potential. The strategy is reviewed on an annual basis to ensure it is up to date with relevant legislation and service priorities.
- 4.2 The Service Development Plan for 2022-23 included objectives for CiC and care leavers.
- 4.3 To achieve this, and deliver the Corporation's roles and responsibilities as a corporate parent the plan for 2022-23 resulted in the following key achievements:
 - Reviewed subsistence in line with cost of living which has meant, for example, that one child could afford to have their laundry washed and dried outside of their flat. It has also helped young people eat sufficiently and see their friends.
 - Matched and went above the extra cost of living payments given by the Government for those on Universal Credit in response to the cost of living crisis.
 - Paid to get young people immigration support through extra legal advice in response to the shortage in legal help (formerly known as legal aid). This has meant, for example, that two young people have had their applications to remain go through court and successfully got permanent leave to remain instead of being deported.
 - Provided all of our young people with an independent visitor and an advocate, or a referral to this support with the option to opt out.
 - Provided video sessions for young people on preparing for tenancies.
 - Involved the Virtual School Head in providing Education, Health and Care Plan for a disabled CiC placed out of borough which has helped support a good transition from nursery to reception.
 - Correctly issued proceedings in an emergency scenario and responded to high risk quickly.
 - Any care leaver with a child can now access the early years provision or children's centre in the City.

5 The Children in Care Council

- 5.1 The Corporation's Children in Care Council (CiCC) was established in November 2014. The CiCC usually meets six times a year during each holiday and half term.
- 5.2 A range of activities and sessions were made available to CiC and care leavers during 2022-23. A focus has been on skills development and responding to needs and aspirations. Topics covered and activities included:
 - Women in construction event with ISG Construction.
 - Taster day at Raddison Blu hotel chain where young people heard about the types of jobs available.
 - Curriculum planning day in partnership with the Barbican where six CiC went to a session to discuss how to make the Barbican's apprenticeship programme better.

- Speaking Out! Oracy Project The Freeman's School to support young people's confidence in public speaking and having a voice.
- Summer activity programme included trips for 5-7 young people to Thorpe Park, bowling, Madame Tussauds and the Tower of London.
- Trips to Kings College London, Tower Bridge, West Ham and Arsenal football stadiums.

5.3 The activities helped the young people come together and build their confidence. They also helped combat isolation, particularly for UASC CiC, and supported young people to develop skills and the English language for those for whom English isn't their first language. The taster day at Radisson Blu resulted in two young people applying for jobs at the hotel chain. They are awaiting the outcome at the time of writing this report.

5.4 The CiCC Pledge was reviewed in 2023 following consultation with CiC and care leavers. It now sets out promises the Corporation has made in response to asks from CiC and care leavers, and sits within the Corporate Parenting Strategy.

6 Health and wellbeing

6.1 As a corporate parent, the 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 immunised or have enough information on immunisation to make their own decisions about vaccinations. The Corporation's performance in achieving health and dental both initial and overall assessments and immunisations exceeds national performance.

6.2 During 2022/23, the CiC Health team carried out statutory initial health assessments (IHA) on 100% of new children in care who remained with us for at least 20 days, and annual health assessments (RHA) on 86% of those in care for at least 12 months.

6.3 All children who had been in care at least 12 months on 31 March 2023 had up-to-date immunisations or were in the process of undertaking the UASC Booster programme at year end.

6.4 78% of children and young people who had been in care at least 12 months received their annual dental checks. The Corporation used the Healthy Smiles referral route (set up in response to the shortage of dentists taking public work) to get our children dental care. The Corporation also paid for private treatment where dental need related to a mental health need.

6.5 No CiC for at least a year was identified as having a substance misuse issue.

6.6 All CiC received their health histories in 2022-23. All children 18-25 have their health histories contain a summary of a young person's overall health and is provided just before their 18th birthday.

6.7 All children in our care for at least one year on 31 March and aged between four and 16 years-old are subject of a statutory Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). These are completed by/with the child's carer and are used to assess the child's

emotional and behavioural health. A low score (under-14) is good, 14 – 16 is classified borderline, and a score of 17+ gives cause for concern. Of those eligible for inclusion in the Corporation's reported SDQ cohort at March 2023, the average score was 12.3. The published national average score for March 2022 was 14, and the Inner London rate was 13.5. The Corporation's small eligible cohort must be noted as impacting our performance.

7 Safeguarding our children

- 7.1 All our CiC and care leavers are allocated a fully-qualified social worker. Social workers offer support in areas such as identity, health, leisure, education and friendship.
- 7.2 Delivery has benefitted – and the service learnt – from better triangulation of data across services areas to identify vulnerable children across Education, Early Years, Early Help and Children Social Care. This has helped the department to retain line of sight on the most vulnerable children in the City, including CiC and care leavers. There is also a strategic line between the Head of Children's Services, the Virtual School Head and health colleagues across City and Hackney looking at CiC and care leavers out of borough who have an EHCP (2 including a care leaver). This helps strengthen the system.
- 7.3 By Quarter 4 of 2022/23 there were no CiC missing from their placements.
- 7.4 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. CiC who go missing from placements are at particular risk and vulnerable to sexual and other exploitation. Therefore, if a child in the Corporation's care goes missing, they are considered vulnerable to Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and are reviewed by the Multi Agency Sexual Exploitation Group. This results in vulnerability factors being addressed in case planning and multi-agency meetings.

8 Education and employment

- 8.1 The Virtual School Head (VSH) reports on the education and employment of our CiC and care leavers on an annual basis following the educational year.
- 8.2 The Virtual School team works with colleagues in health, social care and education providing advice and support and promote the importance of education in decision making for children and young people. The Virtual School also works with Prospects to ensure young people get informative careers advice and support to get into further and higher education, apprenticeships and work.
- 8.3 For the period April 2022 – March 2023, there were a total of 121 young people on the Virtual School systems; 42 were school-aged children of which 6 were CiC, 32 were post -16 of which 28 were CiC and 47 were 19+ of which 46 were CiC. The significant decrease in numbers on the previous year is a result of the dispersal of Afghan Resettlement guests, who were previously placed in the virtual school whilst school placements were sourced.

- 8.4 The overwhelming majority of CiC and care leavers have good attendance at all education enrichment placements, and engagement with learning is high. This is reflected in the Autumn Term 2022 attendance being 87.9% and the Spring Term 2023 being 85.3%.
- 8.5 The Corporation ensures that CiC and care leavers have opportunities to explore the arts, culture, sport and nature as part of the wider school offer:
- Young people can attend the Flying High project which is an extended enrichment programme in partnership with the City of London Boys School.
 - There are several projects linked with the Aldgate School, Open Spaces and Kids Activity Bootcamps (KABS) providing opportunities to get out into nature, walking in the forests, shelter building and planting trees for the future.
 - The Climb project (also Aldgate School) was set up to re-engage children in education following the pandemic, increase resilience and improve mental health and well-being so that children were more able to attend and learn.
 - The Beneath the Trees project in Epping Forest begins in May 2023, providing outdoor activities for children and young people to help develop resilience and good mental health. Following this, young people will be going to The Freeman's School which will provide a residential project teaching English speaking through the medium of Drama and Performing Arts.
- 8.6 Staff are now able to implement the ongoing training received via the early intervention project. This will ensure they can better understand the impacts of trauma, including its impact on sleep, diet, health and mental health, making staff more sensitive particularly to the needs of UASC children and young people.
- 8.7 Electronic Personal Education Plans (PEPs) are now fully established and can now be exported and uploaded onto Mosaic ensuring centralisation of essential documents. This has resulted in a more integrated process where professionals can access shared information more effectively and efficiently. It has also enabled professionals to identify and respond to need quicker.

9 Assessments, case planning and permanency planning

- 9.1 The Corporation's internal audits have shown that assessments during 2022/23 are thorough and reflect the complex situations that families (including those with CiC) may live in.
- 9.2 Permanency planning meetings during 2022-23 were chaired by the Assistant Director for People Services. Public Law Outline and care proceedings were tracked as part of these meetings.
- 9.3 100% of CiC Pathway Plans are completed. 88% of care leavers have up to date Pathway Plans at the end of 2022/23.

10 Independent Reviewing Officer 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 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 looked after child review meetings for all newly accommodated children within 20 working days of them being accommodated.
- 10.4 The IRO service has made significant contributions to the quality assuring and improving of services for children. Pathway planning process and completion and placement stability have significantly increased in 2022/23:
- Consistent participation of children in their review meetings.
 - Implementation of new pathway plan process, leading to increased completion in statutory timescales.
 - Increase in completion of statutory care plans.
 - Increase in extra tuition services for CiC.
 - Decrease in placement disruptions.
 - IRO contacts are now being conducted by text message, phone or face-to-face to increase their uptake and success.

11 Accommodation

- 11.1 Stability is key to a successful placement. It provides the child or young people with a more stable foundation on which to build relationships and feel safe and secure. We support this by holding placement stability meetings in advance of a placement, being aware of the number of moves children have previously had, and managing the expectations of children and young people around the placement before they go so that they know what to expect, this is particularly important with UASC.
- 11.2 Foster placements for the Corporation's CiC are carefully commissioned on an individual basis, to ensure the needs of each child and young person are met. Arrangements are systematically monitored to ensure they are providing a suitable, supportive and stable environment that promotes physical, social and emotional wellbeing.
- 11.3 Foster care is always considered as the starting position for the Corporation's CiC, however semi-independent accommodation will also be considered based on the young person's needs, wishes and any risk identified.

- 11.4 The Corporation has a Quality Assurance Framework which, along with an effective Placement Panel chaired by the Assistant Director for People, assesses and prioritises the suitability and quality of accommodations and placements.
- 11.5 The Corporation's Sufficiency Strategy was reviewed in September 2021 and is under review at the time of writing this report (May 2023).
- 11.6 44% of children were accommodated in fostering placements and 33% were placed in semi-independent accommodation. 15% of children were in their placement for between six and 12 months, with 54% having been with their placement for over one year.
- 11.7 The Corporation places all CiC outside of borough boundaries as we don't have any foster care placements or semi-independent units in the City. Therefore, CiC are placed as close to the City as possible. At the end of March 2023, one CiC was placed over 20 miles from the City, due to placement in a residential school setting.
- 11.8 Wherever it is appropriate to do so, siblings that are looked after are placed together. However, the Corporation did not have any sibling groups within its care cohort during 2022/23.
- 11.9 Eight UASC became care leavers upon reaching the age of 18 during this reporting year and are being supported by the Corporation accordingly.
- 11.10 Of the nine children in care at the end of the reporting year, four were in foster placements, four were in a semi-independent provision, and one was in a children's home annexed to a specialist school.
- 11.11 The Corporation is a member of the West London Commissioning Alliance, a system developed for purchasing social care placements. This created a broader marketplace and has built-in quality assurance functions, and so the Corporation is better able to meet the needs of our young people.
- 11.12 The Social Work team has continued to work with a main placement provider to work around race and racism and how to support young people with issues around this. It was commented by the provider that they had not received this amount of engagement or level of care from other local authority partners.

12 Areas of development and priorities for the year ahead

- 12.1 The Corporate Parenting Strategy and Annual Report will support the outcomes of the Children and Young People's Plan. These include that our children and young people are safe and feel safe, are happy, healthy and enjoy good mental health and wellbeing, have the tools to fulfil their potential and are prepared for success in adulthood, and grow up with a sense of belonging.
- 12.2 The Corporate Parenting Strategy sets out the 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 drive the achievement of this in 2023/24 through continuing and enhanced services, and the delivery of targeted actions. These include:
- Continuing to support children and families through experiences of racism and continue to be an actively anti-racist service. This has, for example, enabled

young people to talk about race and racism with their social worker and bring it up in assessments.

- Increasing awareness of the CiCC Pledge and ensure that all our young people are confident in our promises.
- Supporting access to culturally appropriate early wellbeing support so that young people can understand and connect to their own cultures. This means that children are less lonely and can celebrate their culture soon upon arrival.
- Continuing to support the mental health of USAC and support trauma reduction through earlier intervention to prevent mental health crisis.
- Continuing to support the mental health of local children and families through earlier intervention and preventing reaching crisis point.
- Tackling loneliness and ensure that all young people have at least one trusted adult.
- Supporting young people to access good quality and permanent housing so that they have a safe roof over their head, which has a positive impact on their education and wellbeing.
- Supporting our young people with culturally appropriate immigration support so that they know where they're going to be living and can plan and think about how to bring family members to this country if relevant.
- Running a rolling preparation for independence training programme to support young people to understand their tenancies and not breach them, thereby preventing homelessness.
- Strengthening the transitions pathway between adult and children's social care and education so that there is no wait for support between the ages of 17 and 18 years old and young people have a better sense of what is going to happen in the future.
- Developing a pre-apprenticeship scheme for young people to support them to access training and good-quality employment opportunities.
- Helping care experienced parents to support better outcomes for their children. For example, by providing a social worker who offers additional support in the absence of family members.
- Continuing to offer any care leaver with a child access to the early years provision or children's centre in the City.