

Committee: Safeguarding Sub-Committee	Dated: 23/11/2023
Subject: Children’s Social Care and Early Help Service Development Plan 2022–23	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	Contribute to a flourishing society 1. People are safe and feel safe. 2. People enjoy good health and wellbeing.
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain’s Department?	N/A
Report of: Judith Finlay, Executive Director of Community and Children’s Services	For Information
Report author: Rachel Talmage, Head of Service, People Department, Department of Community and Children’s Services	

Summary

The Service Development Plan has been fully refreshed for 2023–24 and sets out the overarching programme of work for the Children’s Social Care and Early Help Service. Key pieces of work include the full revision of our care leaver offer for 2023–2026 with the goal of presenting a world-class offer, and the development of a summer English for Speakers of other Languages programme.

The purpose of the report is to enable Members to see the array of work supporting resident children in need of help and protection in the City of London, and the direction of travel and actions needed to be world class across all areas of practice with children and their families.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Background

1. The Service Development Plan 2023–24 (see Appendix 1) sets out objectives that aim to improve outcomes for children and their families. Objectives are drawn from listening to children and families, from staff, audit, the Achieving Excellence Board, Serious Case Reviews, Ofsted, and work from the London Innovation and Improvement Alliance (LIIA). Ofsted has a new separate judgement for care leavers, and our ambition is excellence for all care leavers. The Service Development Plan (the Plan) sets out how we will achieve excellent outcomes for every child and young person.
2. In their *Inspection of children's social care services 2 March 2020 to 6 March 2020*, Ofsted made two recommendations in their judgement on our practice¹ (published April 2020). These recommendations remain in the Plan to ensure due focus and attention.

Current Position

3. This report highlights the impact of our work undertaken in the last six months, and progress against actions for the next six months. The Plan has been fully updated and RAG ratings amended.
4. The findings of the annual survey of children and families were published in August 2023, and recommendations included in the Service Development Plan.
5. The 2022–23 Plan has been in place now for six months, and key achievements to date include:
 - The care leaver offer has been fully revised, going above and beyond the Care Leaver Covenant, and including culture/music/arts, and acknowledging that enrichment offers joy/hope/promise/belonging and confidence.
 - The housing element of the care leaver offer has been expanded, recognising that this is the most important area to our young people. There is an expectation gap, caused by the misinformation in promises given to young people by traffickers, and it can be difficult for young people to understand that all locations and housing sizes are not available.
 - The tenancy support team has met with young people in advance of their tenancies, shared a one-page information sheet on housing, and participation plans for 2023/24, including housing sessions and resharing the housing video.
 - Families open to either Early Help or children's social care were supported via our full family therapy clinic. The new academic year has begun with new trainees (note that all participants are trained experienced therapists, this is an additional qualification via King's College London under the tuition of Dr Temitope Ademosu).

¹ <https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50149902> accessed 28 April 2022

- Newly arrived unaccompanied asylum-seeking children have been successfully transferred via the National Transfer Scheme. Social workers advocated for the children to move together to one area, following their attachment at home and via their English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) colleges. The moves were well prepared and thought out, and the young people are happy in their new locations.
- There has been additional scrutiny and challenge to Child in Need plans, largely for children with disabilities. This extra input means that children should be heard and seen, and plans are clear about improvements for their daily lives, and support needed for their parents/carers.
- A staff away day has been scheduled – this is particularly for fieldworkers to get together face to face and to use Epping Forest, one of our green spaces. Another aim is to help our staff access all that the Corporation has to offer, to then enable our children and families to be able to access all that the Corporation has to offer. The Philomena Protocol, which strengthens informed practice for work around missing children in care and trauma, was the focus of the work.

6. Future priorities include:

- i. Co-ordinating a supported session for children with disabilities, looked-after children and care leavers at the Careers Fair in the Guildhall in the new year. This will show our children possibilities and ideas for the future, in their own session with staff support. This involves joint work between Adult Education, the Virtual School, and Children’s Social Care and Early Help.
- ii. Further training for staff around autism, in line with the new requirement in the Health and Care Act 2022. Our staff team currently have extensive experience, both personally and professionally, and are looking forward to joint learning with Adult Social Care colleagues.
- iii. Work with the newly formed Designated Social Care Officer (DSCO) London Forum, to strengthen our offer in our ambition to be world class for children with disabilities.
- iv. Reporting on compliments and complaints, and adding a learning cycle from child and family feedback. The compliments far outweigh complaints, and all feedback is useful and valued. We need to learn from both and identify any system development.
- v. Becoming the ‘family firm’ to our care leavers and children in care:
 - a. To have a co-ordinated work experience/internship offer
 - b. To have ringfenced apprenticeships for care leavers
 - c. To offer meaningful weekly work-related sessions for young people who are for any reason unable to work/study in a traditional setting. For example, if a young person was only well enough to do one hour a week’s work, then we would offer one hour of work. It would then build routine, relationships, and raise ambition. The goal is to have no children who are not in education or employment.

Key Data

7. Performance data for the service is being considered separately by the Safeguarding Sub-Committee. Data is used to drive the actions in the plan and to evaluate progress for children. The data is well shared and understood, and is constantly refined and amended jointly between performance and Children's Social Care and Early Help.

Corporate & Implications

8. Across every department, the Corporation is a parent to our children in care and care leavers.
9. The Events team have supported our care leaver work by hosting the Shining Stars Event, and through our Celebration Awards Ceremony for children in care and care leavers during Events week.
10. Adult Education is working closely with the Virtual School Head, and the Head of Children's Social Care is sharing apprenticeship offers with our care leavers weekly via the team. This is to raise aspirations and also to demonstrate the breadth of work undertaken by the organisation, which they could participate in.

Strategic Risk Implications

11. Child safeguarding involves assessment and mitigation of risk. The service aims to protect and support the most vulnerable children in our society. The Achieving Excellence Board further scrutinises and extends our work for these children.

Equalities implications

12. The 'social GRACES' (gender, race, religion, ethnicity, employment, class, culture, ethnicity, education, employment, sexuality, sexual orientation, and spirituality) are used in individual and group supervision, looking at the similarities and differences in every piece of casework. Equalities implications are core in every interaction. Systemic relationship-based practice is central to our work, and the social GRACES offer us a framework for considering disproportionality and inequity.
13. The Plan sets out a path seeking to recognise 'care leaving' as a protected characteristic, and all implications extending to equalities will be explored and evaluated. This work is in progress, pending legal advice on the available options, and will be taken forward for approval.
14. In Early Help, we have noticed that, where relevant, incoming children who are white tend to have services set up for them, such as diagnoses and special educational needs (SEN) support and Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).. We are noticing that black and brown children who are referred have some needs identified, but not all, and services are not always in place. We are undertaking case reviews to identify what could be done earlier, and what the impact would be for the child. We are advocating for more timely services and noticing in supervision, in assessment, in case discussion where it seems that the needs of these children are not as visible.

Financial implications

15. Children's social care is a statutory service. If, for example, children arrive in the City with additional needs, (such as the Afghan arrivals), and/or further children with disabilities arrive, then a service must be provided. If risks escalate, then court action might be required. These unexpected needs will have financial implications.

Resource implications

16. Free bus passes for all care leavers were approved since the last iteration of this report. Transport for London have announced that it will offer 50% off travel for care leavers. This will reduce the cost of our offer by 50% (approximately £15,000).

Legal implications

17. The ambition to have 'care leaver' as a protected characteristic has received legal advice, and this work is currently being further explored given this input.

Climate implications

18. N/A

Security implications

19. N/A

Conclusion

20. The Service Development Plan sets out the actions for the next year, with an overall ambition of providing the right help in the right place at the right time, to promote the safety and wellbeing of children and their families. This is a live document and will grow in response to family and staff feedback, national research, and audit.

Appendices

- Appendix 1: Service Development Plan 2023–24 Updated October 2023

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