

**City of London**  
**Children in Care and Care Leavers**  
**Participation Annual Report**



**1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024**

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## **1. Introduction**

The 2007 Care Matters: Time for Change White Paper set out the then government's intention for all local authorities to establish a Children in Care Council to provide children and young people, in and leaving care, with additional opportunities to voice their views and experiences of the care system and increase their ability to influence and improve the services they receive from their local authority corporate parents.

The City of London has an established children in Care Council which is coordinated by a Participation Officer, who sits within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service. The remit of the participation worker is wider than coordinating the half termly Children in Care Council meetings and holiday programmes and extends to supporting engagement in all opportunities and services available to children in care and care leavers, including supporting the Virtual School programme of activities.

The participation programme recognises that children and young people's views and experiences are central to service development, and that no policy or service which impacts children and young people should be developed or created without their input. Therefore, the participation offer seeks to engage children and young people in sharing their experiences and views to consult and codesign service delivery.

## **2. What is the Children in Care Council?**

The City of London Children in Care Council (CiCC) is a group for all children and young people who are currently looked after or have previously been looked after by the City of London.

It meets throughout the year to hear the views of children and young people on the services they receive, to make suggestions to make services better, and to get involved in making changes and improvements. The voice of children and young people matter, and it is important the City of London know what they need and want from our services, so we can give them the best opportunities in life as their Corporate Parent.

We hold meetings every half term to do this, where children and young people have the opportunity to meet with Senior Managers, Lead Members, the Town Clerk, and anyone else they'd like to speak to. So, they can share their experiences and wishes for the future and get the support they need to achieve their ambitions.

Through the Children in Care Council children and young people also get opportunities to be part of bigger networks and groups such as the London Children in Care Council, and the Youth Parliament.

Most of the Children in Care Council meetings are held at the Guildhall in the City of London and we provide support for people to attend. We also make sure that we provide food and drinks at meetings, so young people need not worry about missing any meals. We try and hold meetings at times that suit most people, generally early evening after school or college.

Some young people don't necessarily want to attend a meeting, but we would still like to hear their views so will send out surveys or ask young people to try out new systems. We have a participation email address and Whatsapp group so young people can share their views and any thoughts they have on things that are important to them at any time.

We recognise that young people's time and contributions are valuable, and that sharing their experiences with us and hopes for the future isn't always easy. Therefore, when young people attend a Children in Care Council meeting, or take part in a consultation event, or specific piece of work, we will recognise and thank them for this by providing a £20 online voucher.

Participating with the Children in Care Council is more than just meetings and sharing views. Throughout the year we run lots of activities that are about having fun, getting to know new people, or keeping in touch with those they've met before, trying new things, learning new skills, and having different experiences. We have done many different activities across London and outside and are always keen to try exploring new things based on feedback from the group.

### **3. Membership**

The group is open to anyone who is in care or has been in care previously. We work hard to make sure that everyone who meets these criteria is aware of the activities and opportunities available to them. We email those with an active email address, invite young people to join our Whatsapp group, ask social workers to promote events to young people they are working with, notify care and accommodation providers of activities taking place, and have set up a website to share information.

Given our numbers of children in care this year have been relatively low, and some of those live at a distance due to their specific needs, the main attendees of the Children in Care Council meetings and events have been care leavers. The majority of our care leavers are unaccompanied asylum seekers so English is a second language. This tends to mean that they prefer to have discussions face to face rather than online, additional time needs to be factored into supporting conversation, preparation needs to be considered, and a couple of topics/questions focused on per meeting.

### **4. Summary of Activity**

As outlined above the participation programme offers a range of meetings and activities across the year which aim to engage young people in contributing their views, but also in developing a network of support from other young people, and in building confidence in trying new things and experiences.

#### **Children in Care Council Meetings**

There have been 6 Children in Care Council meetings held during the year, which is the expectation. On average each meeting has approximately 6 attendees. During the meetings young people have had the opportunity to speak with the Town Clerk, Lead Member, Executive Director for DCCS, Head of Children's Social Care and Early Help, Head of the Virtual School, and Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance.

The group has provided feedback on The Pledge, accommodation providers, training and apprenticeship options, the Care Leaver Offer, transport access, access to gyms, and the Children in Care Council website. Where specific feedback is given we are keen to ensure that follow up is provided so that young people can see what is done with the information they give us about their lived experiences. This year we have implemented a You Said, We Did response mechanism, which we hope will encourage more young people to share their views with us as they can see the impact that this has, see Appendix A.

We are keen to establish a core group of regular Care Council members ideally approximately 10 young people, so that we can build on them setting the agenda and inviting managers along to speak with them. At present the group is more consultation based with the participation officer and managers setting the agenda, with a core group of established members we could work on building confidence to move to a space of co-collaboration. A group of about 10 young people would allow for drop out and support attendance of 6-7 per meeting, and efforts would need to continue to be made to engage new young people to allow for nature move one as young people age out of the group.

## Events

This year we have held 10 events in additional to the meetings. This has included 4 care leavers attending a Committee Dinner with members, they were supported to buy formal black-tie outfits for the occasion and were impressed by the grandeur of the Guildhall and the interest that members showed in them and their ambitions for the future.

We took 11 young people on a 5 day/4-night residential trip to Buckinghamshire. The group participation in a range of outdoor and trust building activities supported by the participation officer, a social worker from the team, and with visits from other members of the Children's Social Care team. The young people really enjoyed this experience and were able to get to know each other and share their journeys to the UK (as all were unaccompanied asylum seekers). One young person discovered a talent for archery, and one young person subsequently requested and was supported to access swimming lessons. Feedback from the trip included.

I enjoyed every minute of our residential trip from the first to the last day and it has been an amazing experience for me which was my first trip outside London with you. Additionally, I like the environment around the building or the area we stayed in, activities that were going on and primarily the accommodation. It was quite a relaxed atmosphere in comparison to big cities. Finally, I would like to thank to the City of London staff members for organising the trip for us and I am looking forward to the next year if there is an opportunity. Thank you again.

Thank you so much for the holiday. I enjoyed it and had fun with others, you are always good, and you care about us.

Just wanted to say it was a great experience for me I felt like I'm living with my family thanks for taking us to excellent place nice views, great couches thank you for your time, and supporting us. We really appreciate it from our bottom hearts 😊😊😊😊😊

We also held our big annual celebration event which celebrates the academic achievements of all our children in care and care leavers. This was held at the Guildhall and was very well attended with 21 young people coming to take part and have their achievements recognised. Certificates were presented by the Lead Members and young people enjoyed having their progress and recognised. There were two young people present who had completed their degrees that year, and a whole range of ESOL training, and vocational courses such as plumbing and electrics. The Pledge was formally launched at the event and has been translated into the 11 most spoken languages amongst our children in care and care leavers, and can be found on our website; [our-pledge-to-the-children-in-care-council \(cityoflondon.gov.uk\)](https://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/our-pledge-to-the-children-in-care-council).

We had seven young people attend a Pan London Children in Care Council visit to Kings College University to hear about the support available to them to access higher education opportunities. They found this a really interesting session and had lots of questions, which was great, and we hope it has inspired them to consider higher education opportunities.

Young people also had the opportunity throughout the year to go horse riding, go karting, to the cinema, bowling, to a pantomime, and to plenty of lunches and dinners. We also promote all the extra curricular activities available through the Virtual School, Prospects, Partnership for Young London and the Pan London Children in Care Council, so that young people are able to access a range of opportunities through various forums and agencies.

## **5. Impact and Achievements**

This year we have worked on ensuring consistent communication methods with young people to ensure all are made aware of the events and opportunities available to them. We have a regularly updated email distribution list so we can share information directly with young people, a private Whatsapp group which young people can request access to, so they receive information, and follow up phone calls from the participation officer to encourage and support attendance. We have seen this led to more consistent attendance at events, and the start of the development of a core membership.

We have also responded to feedback from young people who have requested a 'one stop shop' of information which is relevant to them. Therefore, a Child in Care Council webpage was developed hosted on the City Family Information Service webpage. This covers a wide range of areas, providing not only information about City based services but also how to access local service depending on where our young people live, as most are not resident in the City. Feedback has been positive, and the young people have requested information in relation to Apprenticeships is added, which is in process. [Children in Care Council \(CiCC\) - City of London Family Information Service](#). Ideally we would like to monitor how many people are accessing this platform but at present that functionality is not available but being worked upon. In Commissioning Review meetings we have been sharing the resource with care providers so that they can promote this with their staff who work with City young people.

We have also drafted an introduction leaflet to explain the Children in Care Council, provide clarity on what impact young people's feedback and views have, to be clear how their time and contribution will be reimbursed, and to highlight that young people can attend Children in Care Council activities without being part of the meetings or consultation processes. This will be ready for distribution in

the next financial year and will form part of the welcome to care pack for new children coming into our care.

We have been able to create links and friendships between our care leavers, who can often feel isolated due to not having family networks in the UK. Young people now attend Children in Care Council activities together.

## 6. Priorities for the next 12 months

Over the next 12 months we want to build on the current momentum in terms of attendance and create a stable core number of Children in Care Council participants to help us progress the below aims.

1. **Young Inspectors** – we would like to train and support young people to get involved in the quality assurance of services provided to our children in care and care leavers. This supports collaboration with those with lived experience to provide insight, different points of view and expectations, and create service development based on coproduction. Training and support will be offered to young people who volunteer to be part of this project, as will recompense for time and travel required. We would like to support young people to inspect commissioned care arrangements to gather their feedback, which can then support strengthened commissioning arrangements and ensure that young people are receiving high quality care that meets their needs.

*“Youth inspection is a method of youth participation that is focused on giving critical feedback to projects, organisations, services, funders, institutions or other bodies that are connected to young people in order to improve the quality of their work. These can be bodies that are directly delivering an offer of services to young people or those involved at arm’s length in policy, strategy or funding.”<sup>1</sup>*

2. **Supper Club** – to support links and relationships between our young people we are looking to establish a monthly supper club starting in April. This would be held on the same day/time each month to be a consistent space in which young people can come together informally and share experiences through food. We would like young people to make restaurant recommendations based on foods from their cultural backgrounds, or favourite foods they have found since being in the UK or during their journey here. This will enable the meeting places to be more flexible and in various locations of London, hopefully making the opportunity accessible to more young people who can find travelling to the City more of a challenge.
3. **Communication Strategy** – we want to build on the progress of this year in terms of consistent communication to our children in care and care leavers. Coordinating with opportunities available through the Virtual School and Prospects to ensure that young people are consistently made aware of opportunities available to them and are given the necessary support to attend. This includes continued development of the website based on feedback from young people, the implementation of an introductory leaflet explaining the Children in Care Council, and ideally the creation of some videos involving young people explaining what they like about being involved in the Children in Care Council, and to show new children in to care places like the Guildhall etc so they can orientate themselves with the City.

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<sup>1</sup> Moxon, D, 2020, Young Inspectors | a guidance framework, Youth Focus North West

## 7. Gallery

### Residential Trip July 2023



### Pantomime 11/01/2024



### Visit to Kings College 14/02/2024





## 8. Appendix A

### Feedback from the CiCC Meeting 26/10/23

What you said.....	What we did.....
<b>Travel Pass availability</b>	All young people have been given the equivalent of 4 months money to cover bus fares, pending the Tfl London Mayor scheme that starts in January 2024
<b>Access to the internet at home</b>	Checks are being made with all care providers to ensure that they are providing Wi-Fi access to all our young people. If you are having problems with access to Wi-Fi in your home speak to your social worker
<b>Accommodation - small, unsuitable</b>	When commissioning accommodation providers we do check on the size and type of accommodation being offered. We want to offer our care leavers permanent accommodation as soon as possible and this does mean that they are likely to be studio flats rather than one-bedroom flats. However, being in permanent accommodation provides more stability than temporary accommodation. Where specific concerns are raised, a manager will offer to visit your accommodation to check the size and functionality of the property to ensure it is appropriate. Where accommodation is unsuitable alternative options will be explored.
<b>Access to working laptops</b>	Replacement laptops can be provided by the Virtual School. If you have an issue with your laptop please contact <a href="mailto:Debby.Rigby@cityoflondon.gov.uk">Debby.Rigby@cityoflondon.gov.uk</a> the Head of the Virtual School, or speak with your social worker.
<b>Extra tuition</b>	Where extra tuition is assessed as a learning need this can be provided by the Virtual School, please contact <a href="mailto:Debby.Rigby@cityoflondon.gov.uk">Debby.Rigby@cityoflondon.gov.uk</a> the Head of the Virtual School, or speak with your social worker.
<b>Careers guidance</b>	<p>All City children in care and care leavers can access providing Information, Advice and Guidance on Education, Employment and Training from Prospects, contact Matilda Newman-Smart at <a href="mailto:City@prospects.co.uk">City@prospects.co.uk</a> or call 07585 401280</p> <p>A new online app CiCi can be accessed from December, which is funded by the Virtual School. The new CiCC website also has a range of support services which can help you find advice around employment opportunities.</p> <p>All will receive an invitation to special sessions at the London Careers Festival in February 2024.</p>
<b>Better communication around events and opportunities</b>	<p>We now have a full up to date contact list for all children in care and care leavers. For those with an email address we will email information of events and opportunities.</p> <p>A great way to stay up to date is to join our CiCC Whatsapp Group <a href="https://chat.whatsapp.com/1rqr4Pk6INLFD2QaVtEuW3">https://chat.whatsapp.com/1rqr4Pk6INLFD2QaVtEuW3</a> you can also find lots of information on our new CiCC website page.</p> <p>We will also be sending a Seasonal Newsletter of upcoming events, the 1<sup>st</sup></p>

	one will come out in December 2023.
<b>Including young people in the development of the Care Leaver Offer</b>	Draft copies of the Care Leaver Offer are available at the CiCC meeting on 19/12/23 for those that attend and would like to take away, review, and respond with suggestions. The offer of a session to review and feedback on the document will be made for those that would like to attend.