

Committee: Community and Children's Service Committee	Dated: 04/07/2024
Subject: Children's Social Care Reform	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	Diverse Engaged Communities. Providing Excellent Services.
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
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
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Summary

This report provides an update for Members on the City of London Corporation (City Corporation) Department for Community and Children's Services (DCCS) response to the Department for Education's (DfE's) Children's Social Care reform programme.

At the end of December 2023, the DfE published several new strategies and plans to reform Children's Social Care. DCCS has taken steps to ensure that it is engaged and compliant with the reform programme, including establishing a Children's Social Care Reform Oversight Group to co-ordinate and manage activity.

DCCS is confident that the City Corporation already delivers against many of the proposals, and there are no major, immediate changes needed to the way we work. However, where actions have been identified, DCCS is working with relevant partners to progress appropriate responses within DfE timelines (by December 2024).

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Background

1. During 2023, the DfE consulted on proposals for Children's Social Care reform and a new National Framework and Dashboard. In December 2023, the DfE published a raft of strategies and guidance, including a new Children's Social Care National Framework, a Data and Digital Strategy, updated *Working Together to Safeguard Children* statutory guidance, and a national Kinship Care Strategy. This was accompanied by guidance on supporting local areas to embed the updated *Working Together* guidance and the National Framework.
2. The National Framework sets out a revised purpose and principles of Children's Social Care, as well as the enablers and outcomes the reform programme is trying to achieve. The outcomes identified are:
 - children, young people and families stay together and get the help they need
 - children and young people are supported by their family network and are safe in and outside of their homes
 - children in care and care leavers have 'stable, loving homes'.
3. Local authorities have until December 2024 to begin work to embed the National Framework and make plans for aligning practice to the expectations for Children's Social Care.
4. The *Working Together to Safeguard Children* statutory guidance has been updated, including a new chapter emphasising the shared responsibility on all agencies to support successful outcomes for children. It also strengthens multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, including clarifying roles and responsibilities of safeguarding partners. The updated guidance aims to have 'a renewed focus' on Early Help, safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, and child protection.
5. The Data and Digital Strategy aims to support a strong data culture and leadership, support systems and technology to meet sector need, and improve the data that is collected, shared and used. Alongside this strategy, DfE published a Children's Social Care Dashboard and indicator update which sets out the development of 'clear and consistent' data indicators to help understand progress on the outcomes and enablers in the National Framework.
6. This reform programme sits alongside DfE reform around children's centres and family hubs, and special educational needs.

Current Position

7. DCCS has been considering, analysing and responding to the proposals in the Children's Social Care reform programme. It has set up a Children's Social Care Reform Oversight Group, which is chaired by the Assistant Director People and brings together leaders from across Children's Social Care and Early Help, Early

Years and Education, Quality Assurance and Safeguarding, and the Virtual School. The group meets regularly to assess any government policy or legislative changes, and review an action and risk log. The Group is also tasked with working with relevant partners to deliver against the actions.

8. DCCS is continuing to ensure that it is informed and up to date with the government's Children's Social Care reform programme by attending DfE and Social Care Institute for Excellence briefings and events, and meetings with DfE officials. Information and lessons are then shared internally.
9. Analysis of the Children's Social Care reform programme took place during the government's consultation phase and is being continually reviewed. The City Corporation is already delivering against many of the proposals, and there are no major, immediate changes needed to the way we work.
10. The analysis has been recorded in a detailed spreadsheet aligned with the key themes of the reform. Actions and conclusions from this analysis include:
 - **Family help:** the City Corporation is not one of the pathfinder local authorities that are testing approaches to social care during 2023–2025. However, DCCS will consider and engage with any evaluation and lessons from the pathfinders as they are published.
 - **Child protection:** DCCS is working with the City and Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership to respond to the updated *Working Together* statutory guidance and progress appropriate actions within DfE timelines (by December 2024).
 - **Family networks:** DCCS is taking action in response to the new national Kinship Care Strategy, including addressing new Virtual School Kinship Care responsibilities and assessing our information and support offer for kinship carers.
 - **Children in care:** The City Corporation already provides £3,000 leaving care allowance and has a care leaver rent guarantor scheme.
 - **Social workers:** There is an existing offer in place to strengthen social worker skills and knowledge, including offering every social worker training to at least Level 1 in Systemic Social Work Practice.
 - **Evidence and data:** It is understood that the first iteration of the Dashboard will use existing data that local authorities are required to collect and will be published in late 2024.
11. The Ofsted inspection framework for Children's Social Care will not change.
12. There have been no legislative changes. The government is restricted in the scope of its reform by the General Election which must be held by 28 January 2025.
13. DCCS officers will continue to engage with the DfE, partners and families (where appropriate) to ensure that we are in line with any national policy changes around Children's Social Care reform.

14. DCCS is considering how to ensure that our language and reporting reflects the reform so we are effectively communicating what we deliver within this policy context.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

15. Strategic implications – The City Corporation’s response to the DfE’s Children’s Social Care reform aligns with the Corporate Plan 2024–29 outcomes of providing excellent services and ensuring that there are diverse, engaged communities. Aims of the DCCS Delivery Plan include: people of all ages and all backgrounds live in safe communities; and our homes are safe and well maintained and our estates are protected from harm.

16. Financial implications – none.

17. Resource implications – none.

18. Legal implications – none.

19. Risk implications – none.

20. Equalities implications – An equality impact assessment has not been completed as there are no fundamental changes.

21. Climate implications – none.

22. Security implications – none.

Conclusion

23. The DfE published a raft of strategies and guidance in December 2023 with the aim of reforming Children’s Social Care to have a greater focus on keeping families together and, where this is not possible, creating stable homes.

24. Members are asked to note that the DCCS is aware of the changes and has put activities in place to ensure that the City Corporation is, or will be, compliant within the government timescales. The reform programme will continue to be monitored and assessed in 2024 and will be reassessed in 2025 following the General Election. The DCCS focus remains on delivering the best possible services and support for City of London children, young people and families.

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