

Corporate Parenting in the City of London

Annual Report – 2023/24

Safeguarding Sub-Committee Nov 2024

1 Introduction and context

- 1.1 This annual report updates on the City of London Corporation's (the City Corporation) role as a corporate parent, and the outcomes that have been achieved for the children in our care during the period April 2023 to March 2024.
- 1.2 The City Corporation is a corporate parent to the children in its care aged 0 to 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 in care (Children in Care) can include unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC), children with disabilities and those who have suffered abuse and/or neglect. As such, Children in Care 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 received a focus visit from Ofsted to inspect the City 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 City 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 City Corporation has supported our Children in Care and care leavers over the past year.

2 The children in our care

- 2.1 At the end of the reporting period in March 2024 the City Corporation had a total of 7 children and young people under the age of 18 who were being looked after by the local authority, including 4 UASC (57%). Fifteen children came into care during the year.
- 2.1 In total 18 children and young people ceased to be Children in Care and of these 15 had also come into care during 2023-24. 12 young people were transferred to the services of other local authorities via the National Transfer Scheme. The City Corporation's Children in Care were all male; (7 of 7) on 31 March 2024. 43% of these young people were Black African (3 of 7).
- 2.2 At the end of March 2024, there were two Children in Care and one care leaver who had an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).
- 2.3 There was one final Adoption order granted during 2023/24.

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. 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 Children in Care and care leavers
 - Overseeing progress 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 Between April 2023 and March 2024, the Sub-Committee has considered reports on topics including:
- Care Leaver Compact
 - unregulated placement commissioning and oversight arrangements
 - children and families service performance
 - Children's Social Care and Early Help service development plan 2022-2023
 - private fostering annual report 2022 to 2023
 - corporate parenting annual report 2022/2023 and corporate parenting strategy update
 - Virtual School Headteacher annual report for academic year 2022/2023
 - Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) annual report 2022-2023
- 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 City Corporation's commitment to ensuring that Children in Care and care leavers have the support, care and encouragement they need to reach their full potential. Our current strategy will be refreshed during autumn 2024 to reflect progress and ensure we capture the views of our Children and Young People.
- 4.2 The children's social care and school Service Development Plans for 2023-24 included specific objectives for Children in Care and care leavers.
- 4.3 In delivering the City Corporation's roles and responsibilities as a corporate parent there were the following key achievements:
- a pan-London celebration of care experienced young people was set up and hosted by the City of London Virtual School in July 2023. Twenty-two local authorities from across London recognised and celebrated the

achievements of young people from Virtual Schools. Three City of London young people were recognised as 'Shining Stars'

- experience of care was agreed as a being akin to a protected characteristic by the Court of Common Council in January 2024
- the Children in Care Pledge was reviewed, and a revised version launched in November 2023. This has been translated into the 11 most spoken languages among City of London Children in Care and care leavers

4.4 The year also saw ongoing mechanisms and processes which support our role as Corporate Parent. These included:

- the Virtual School responding to changing demands. Increased capacity will be added to the team by January 2025 to ensure it can support all children and young people within its remit to achieve the best possible outcomes
- Children in Care and care leavers experienced a diverse, enrichment programme that helps develop their personal and life skills to support their journey through education, employment or training
- quality assurance mechanisms provided a strong framework to ensure children and young people are getting the right support at the right time
- practice reviews and scrutiny of commissioned services ensured a continued focus on quality and equity
- there was a continued focus on workforce development to support skilled, knowledgeable and kind professionals. The continuous professional development and sharing of skills are essential to ensuring children, young people and their families get the support and services they need

5 The Children in Care Council

5.1 The City Corporation's Children in Care Council (CiCC) was established in November 2014. The Children in Care Council usually meets six times a year during each holiday and half term.

5.2 A range of activities and sessions were made available to Children in Care and care leavers during 2023-24. Communication methods with young people were strengthened which resulted in more consistent attendance at events and the start of the development of a core membership. An overview includes:

- opportunities to meet with senior leaders including the Town Clerk and the Lead Elected Member
- four care leavers attended a Committee Dinner with elected Members
- 11 young people went on a 4-night residential trip completing outdoor and trust building activities
- 7 young people attended a pan-London CiCC visit to King's College University to hear about support available to them to access higher education opportunities

- a monthly supper club to provide social support and foster friendships through food
 - opportunities to experience a trip to the theatre and free or highly subsidised theatre offers via the CiCC website.
- 5.3 The activities helped the young people come together to form friendships and support each other, helping to tackle isolation due to not having family networks in the UK. Young people now attend CiCC activities together. The residential trip enabled young people to enjoy a shared experience and discover new talents.
- 5.4 The CiCC Pledge was reviewed in 2023 following consultation with Children in Care and Care Leavers. It sets out the promises the City Corporation has made in response to asks from Children in Care and care leavers and will form the basis of the revised Corporate Parenting Strategy. The Pledge was launched at the Virtual School annual celebration event. Twenty-one young people attended, two had completed degrees, others GCSE's, some had been successful at various levels of ESOL training, and some had successfully completed vocational training in plumbing and electrics. The Pledge was translated into eleven different languages.
- 5.5 To ensure that all care leavers know about the CiCC Pledge, a CiCC website was developed with children and young people, the Pledge was promoted with care providers and through the CiCC newsletter and monthly information sessions increased knowledge and understanding of care leaver entitlements.
- 5.6 The CiCC provided feedback on initiatives including the Pledge, training and apprenticeship options and the Care Leaver Offer. A 'you said, we did' mechanism enables young people to see what is done with the information they share about their lived experiences. For example, young people raised issues around access to working laptops and the you said, we did provides a clear point of contact for young people to contact to raise these issues.

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 immunised or have enough information on immunisation to make their own decisions about vaccinations.
- 6.2 The health and education needs of UASC are identified immediately when they arrive in the City of London to ensure there is a responsive service to meet their needs.
- 6.3 During 2023/24, the Children in Care Health team carried out all health assessments as required (IHA and RHA) with 86% of them being within timescale.
- 6.4 All children who had been in care at least 12 months on 31 March 2024 had up-to-date immunisations or were in the process of undertaking the UASC Booster programme at year end.

- 6.5 100% of children and young people who had been in care at least 12 months received their annual dental checks. The City 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 City Corporation also paid for some private treatment where dental need was impacting on mental health.
- 6.6 No Children in Care were recorded as having a substance misuse issue.
- 6.7 All Children in Care received their health histories in 2023-24. All children 18-25 have their health histories which contains a summary of a young person's overall health and is provided just before their 18th birthday.
- 6.8 Children's social workers support early adoption and pre-birth work when appropriate. For example, one children's social worker delivered pre-birth work, care proceedings and legal permanency work resulting in early adoption being considered as a parallel plan pre-birth.

7 Safeguarding our children

- 7.1 All our Children in Care 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 At the end of Quarter 4, there were no Children in Care missing from their placements.
- 7.3 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. Therefore, if a child in the City 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.
- 7.4 In March 2024, a scrutiny process with the City of London Police reviewed a random sample of Police Protection Notices received in a six-month period with the aim of facilitating joint working and identifying learning and any barriers. Actions included the Police agreeing to dual notify the home local authority and the City Corporation when children who are not City of London children come to the notice of the Police. This scrutiny activity will be undertaken twice a year.

8 Education and employment

- 8.1 The Virtual School has embraced its additional duties and is now also providing a service for post looked after children and children with a social worker. It recognises the challenges for Children With a Social Worker Ever 6 and recognises the benefits of working with children receiving Early Help services to

prevent escalation. A temporary structure is in place to meet the additional duties, whilst increased capacity is put in place.

- 8.2 The Virtual School team works with colleagues in Education, Health and Social Care 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 The Virtual School Advisory Partnership was established in December 2023 and acts as a body of colleagues who promote the education of children and young people within the Virtual School They work with the school to ensure that it continues to develop and provide the very best service for the children and young people it serves.
- 8.4 For the period April 2023 to March 2024, a total of 121 young people were held on the Virtual School register:
 - 7 Children in Care 5-16-years old - 4 of these subsequently moved to other local authorities on the National Transfer Scheme
 - 27 children with a social worker on CiN and CP plans
 - 6 children living with kinship carers and 4 previously looked-after children
 - 19 young people aged 16-18-years-old were supported and monitored before leaving Key Stage 5 or being transferred on the National Transfer Scheme - 4 of these were subject to a CiN plan and 15 were Children in Care
 - 58 care leavers 18-25-years-old were monitored and supported
 - 4 children who had had a social worker in the past (CWSW Ever 6) requested and received support
- 8.5 The overwhelming majority of Children in Care and care leavers have good attendance at all education enrichment placements, and engagement with learning is high. Of note, many colleges only record attendance when the young person is on site attending lessons. There are times when students are given permission to be off-site, e.g. completing work experience, but these are recorded as absent.
- 8.6 Children with attendance concerns are discussed at the monthly Vulnerable Children's Group meeting which brings together representatives from the Virtual School, Education, Children's Social Care, SEND and Early Years teams.
- 8.7 The City Corporation ensures that Children in Care and care leavers have opportunities to explore the arts, culture, sport and nature as part of the wider school offer:
 - an Oracy Project delivered by the City of London Virtual School in partnership with the Freemans School delivered drama to improve confidence and spoken English. Young people said that the sessions gave them more confidence to speak out in college and at interviews. Care experienced young people from across London also invited

- the Virtual School ran a forest school project focusing on forest school skills, science, nature, wellbeing and resilience. Young people enjoyed being outside in nature and were able to talk informally about their hopes and dreams and Virtual School staff were able to support them in their education journey. Care experienced young people from across London were also invited
 - City of London young people attended an enrichment project called 'Flying High' held at the City of London Boys School. Lessons have included music, cookery, PE, Science and English
- 8.8 The Virtual School put in place additional resource during the August 2023 summer holidays to support young people with college applications and interviews. This resulted in more young people entering college at the start of the school year.
- 8.9 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. The Virtual School Head attends each child's PEP meeting to ensure that targets are SMART and young people are supported.
- 8.10 Children's Social Care and Adult Education continue to work closely to develop an extended pre-apprenticeship programme. In February 2024, young people attended an information event making them aware of the options and jobs available. The Partnership for Young London and Virtual School are supporting four young apprenticeships, one of which is a care leaver from the City of London. Of the 100 Corporation funded apprenticeship posts, 10% are ring fenced for care leavers. Information on apprenticeships has been added to Children in Care Council (Children in Care Council) website so it is consistent and accessible.
- 8.11 . There were bespoke sessions at the London Careers Festival in February and March 2024, running small groups with care leavers on increased employment opportunities and working with care leavers on longer term financial planning through apprenticeships.
- 8.12 In March 2024, 36 (67%) of City of London care leavers had applied for the Transport for London's scheme giving them 50% off bus and tram travel. The City Corporation will cover the other 50% so City of London care leavers get free bus and tram travel. This will save around £800 per person compared to an annual bus and tram pass. Other care leavers have accessed a free bus pass via benefits to support them at college.

9 Assessments, case planning and permanency planning

- 9.1 The City Corporation's independent audits Children in Care reflected that assessments are of a high standard. Most aspects of a child's life are explored fully, and partners' contribution is regularly sought and adds value. Timescales are adhered to and there is good management oversight and analysis.

- 9.2 Permanency planning meetings during 2023-24 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 Children in Care Pathway Plans were completed and 96% of care leavers had up to date Pathway Plans at the end of 2023/24.

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 City Corporation.
- 10.2 The IRO sits away from the Children's Social Care and Early Help 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 and Early Help Team notifies the IRO of all children received into care within 72 hours. During 2023 – 24, 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. This includes:
- 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 Children in Care
 - 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 for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.
- 11.2 Foster placements for the City Corporation's Children in Care 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 City Corporation's Children in Care, however semi-independent accommodation will

also be considered based on the young person's needs, wishes and any risk identified.

- 11.4 The City 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 City Corporation's Sufficiency Strategy is reviewed annually and guides our commissioning of placements and accommodation.
- 11.6 57% of children were accommodated in fostering placements and 14% were placed in semi-independent accommodation. 57% of children were in their placement for less than 12 months, with 43% having been with their placement for over one year.
- 11.7 The City Corporation places all Children in Care outside of borough boundaries as we don't have any foster care placements or semi-independent units in the City of London. Therefore, Children in Care are placed as close to the City of London as possible. The two children placed more than 20 miles away from the City of London Office are in specialist placements due to their additional needs. By definition 4 UASC children are placed 20 miles or more from home.
- 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 2023/24.
- 11.9 The National Transfer Scheme (NTS) resulted in most new UASC who were initially accommodated by the City of London being moved to a local authority outside of London within a few weeks of being accommodated. This has also led to a reduction in City of London Children in Care numbers. 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 seven children in care at the end of the reporting year, four were in foster placements, one was in a semi-independent provision, one residential school, and one was in a children's home annexed to a specialist school.
- 11.11 The City 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 City 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 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 drive the achievement of this in 2024/25 through continuing and enhanced services, and the delivery of targeted actions. These include:

- Increase visibility of Early Help in the community
- Explore disproportionality of access to children's services
- Further develop the CiCC
- Continue to strengthen the Care Leaver Offer
- Strengthen information for families around housing
- Increase the capacity of the Virtual School
- Reduce the number of children and young people who are NEET
- Strengthen the offer for young carers and kinship care
- Embed a new quality assurance framework methodology
- National children's social care reform