

# SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY FOR CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS

2024-2027

## About this document

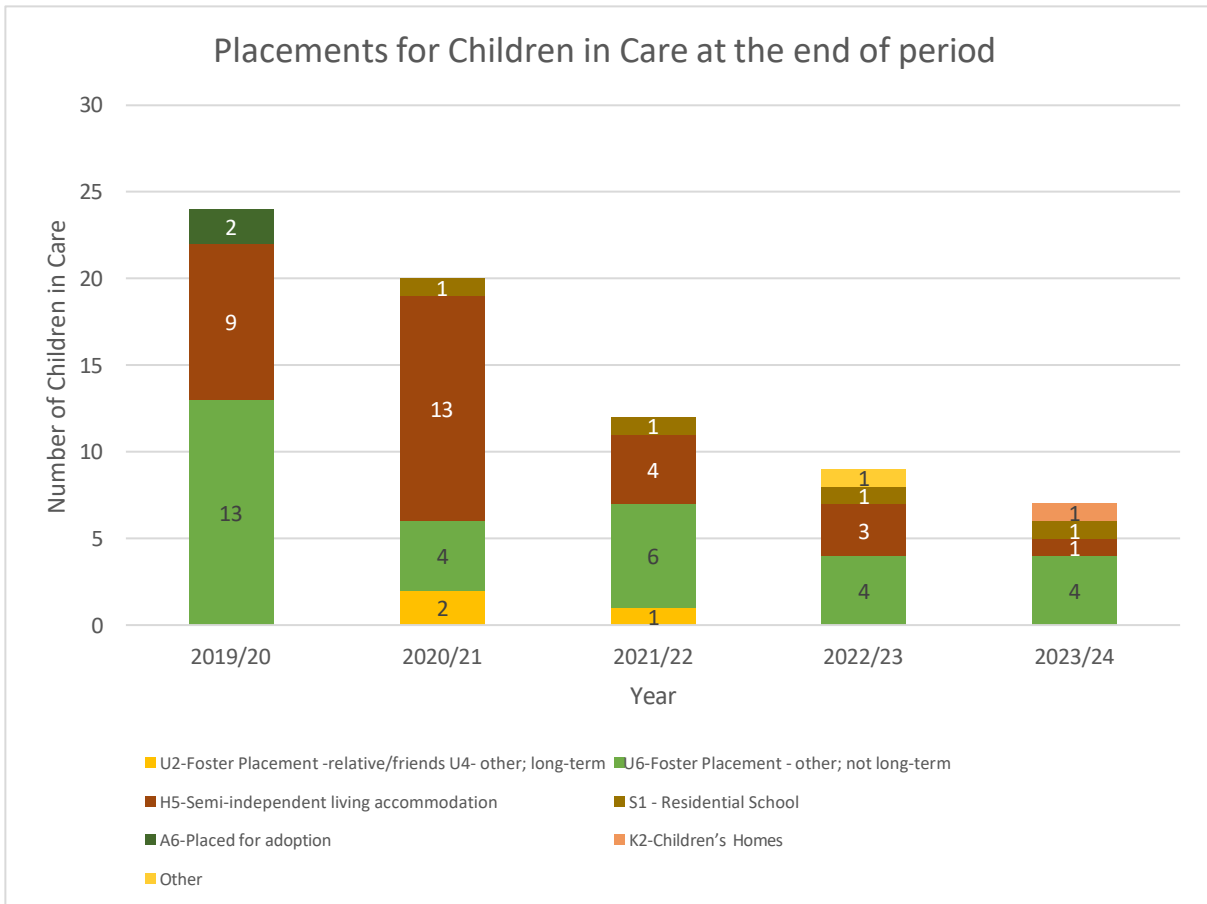
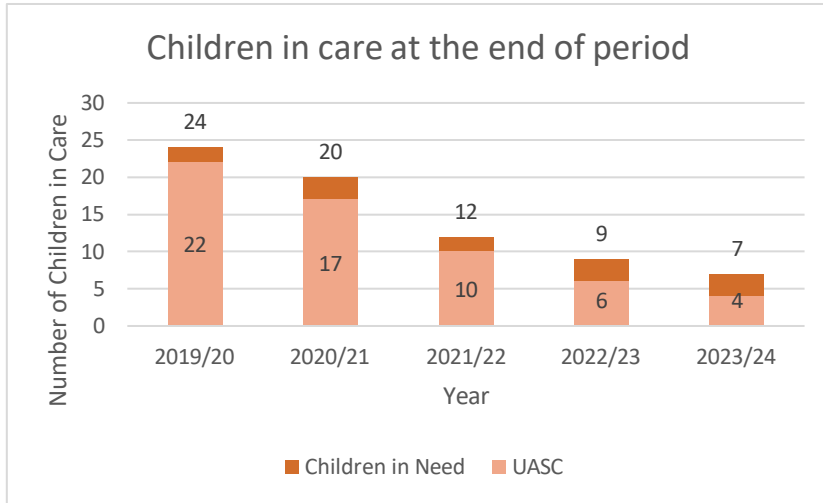
<b>Title</b>	Sufficiency Strategy for Children in Care and Care Leavers
<b>Purpose</b>	To set out the City Corporation's approach to secure sufficient accommodation for children in our care, and those leaving our care.
<b>Updated by</b>	Head of Commissioning
<b>Approved by</b>	Director of Community and Children's Services
<b>Date</b>	August 2024
<b>Version number</b>	1
<b>Status</b>	Final
<b>Review frequency</b>	Annual
<b>Next review date</b>	September 2025

## 1 Introduction

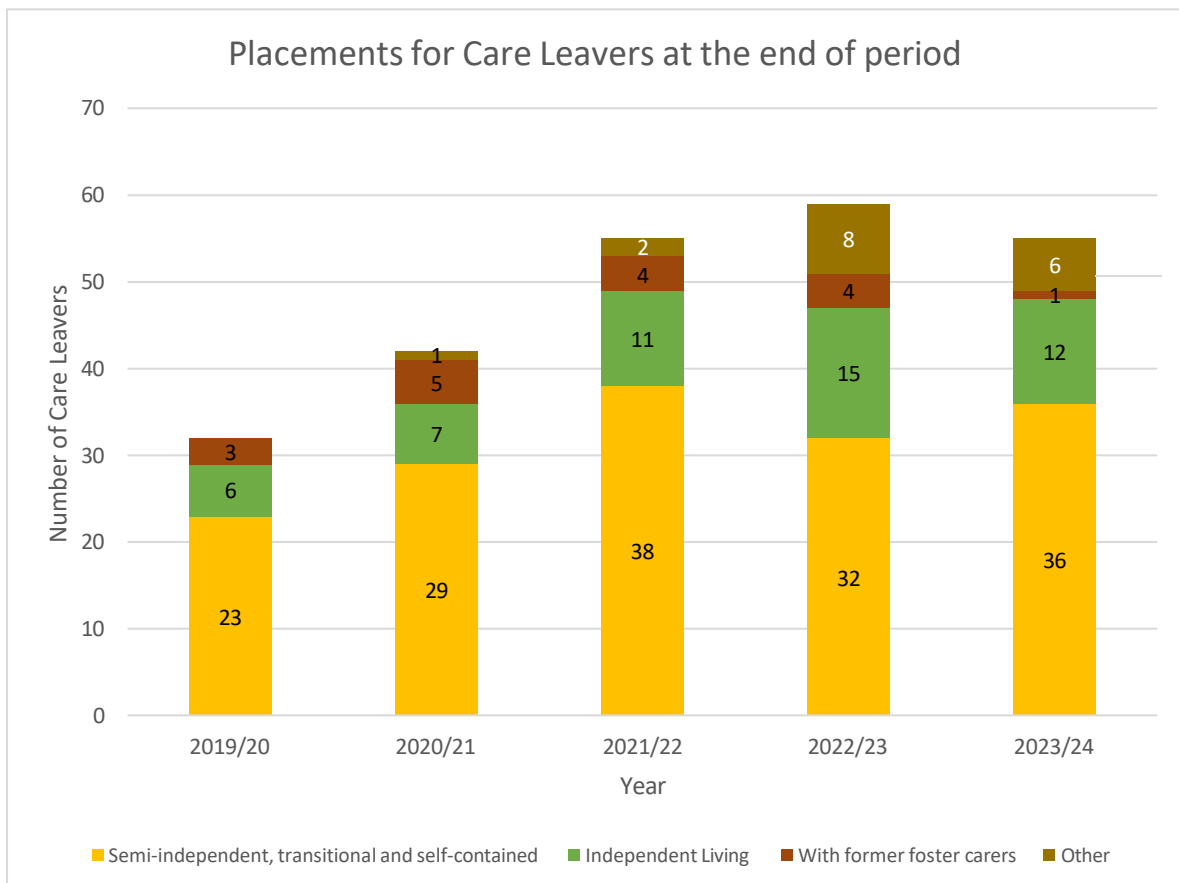
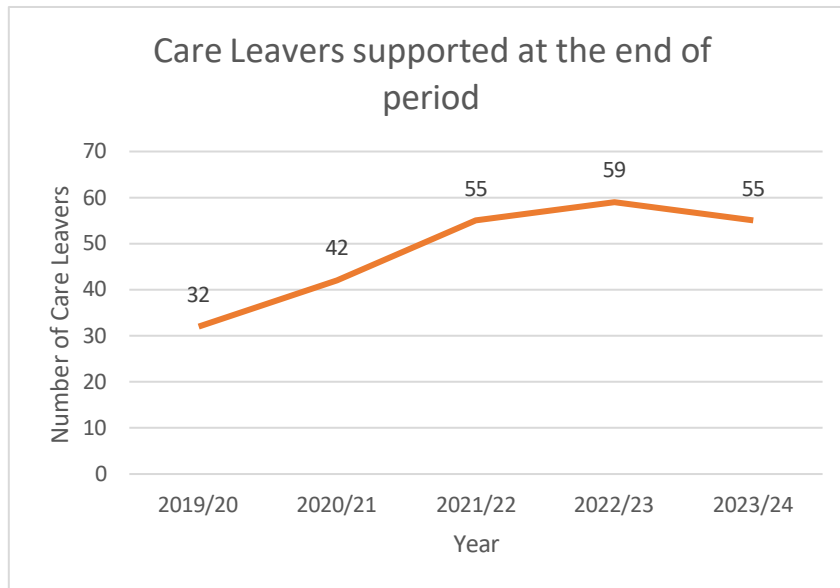
- 1.1 The Sufficiency Strategy for Children in Care and Care Leavers sets out the City of London Corporation's approach to securing accommodation for the children that come into our care, and for those leaving care.
- 1.2 Local authorities have a statutory duty to take steps to secure, as far as is reasonably practicable, enough placements within their boundaries to meet the needs of children in care and care leavers. The approach taken by the City Corporation reflects its size, population and the nature of needs that we respond to.
- 1.3 The City – at just over a square mile – is renowned as a centre of business. However, it is home to 8,600 residents – of whom just over 700 are aged from birth to 18 years of age. The size of the City, the predominance of commercial property, and its population are such, that very few children come into care from our residential community, the opportunities for fostering within the community are limited and rare, and there is no registered children's provision within our boundaries.
- 1.4 Most children and young people who come into our care – and who we support leaving care - are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people (UASC). Their journey into care, their separation from family and community and their needs and aspirations, shapes the demand for accommodation and support to provide their care.
- 1.5 Our approach to securing homes for those for whom we care, is underpinned by skilled social care team, that can work with a child or young person through their care journey to secure independence in adulthood.
- 1.6 Over five years the pattern of demand has shifted from those coming into care to those leaving care, leading to a greater focus on securing suitable accommodation and independence.
- 1.7 This strategy seeks to sustain the strengths of our approach to securing safe, secure and appropriate homes, to respond to the challenge of changing demand and needs, and to provide resilience in the future. It sits alongside the Children and Young People's Plan - supporting the vision of that document that our children in care, and our care leavers *"feel safe, have good mental health and wellbeing, fulfil their potential and are ready for adulthood"*.

## 2 Our children in care and care leavers

- 2.1 At the end of March 2024 there were seven children in care, of whom four were unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people and three Children in Need. The number of Children in Need - children who have come into care from the City's resident community - has totalled two or three, for each of the last five years. The marked change has been the decline in unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people in care across the period – falling from 22 at the end of March 2020 to just four at the end of March 2024.



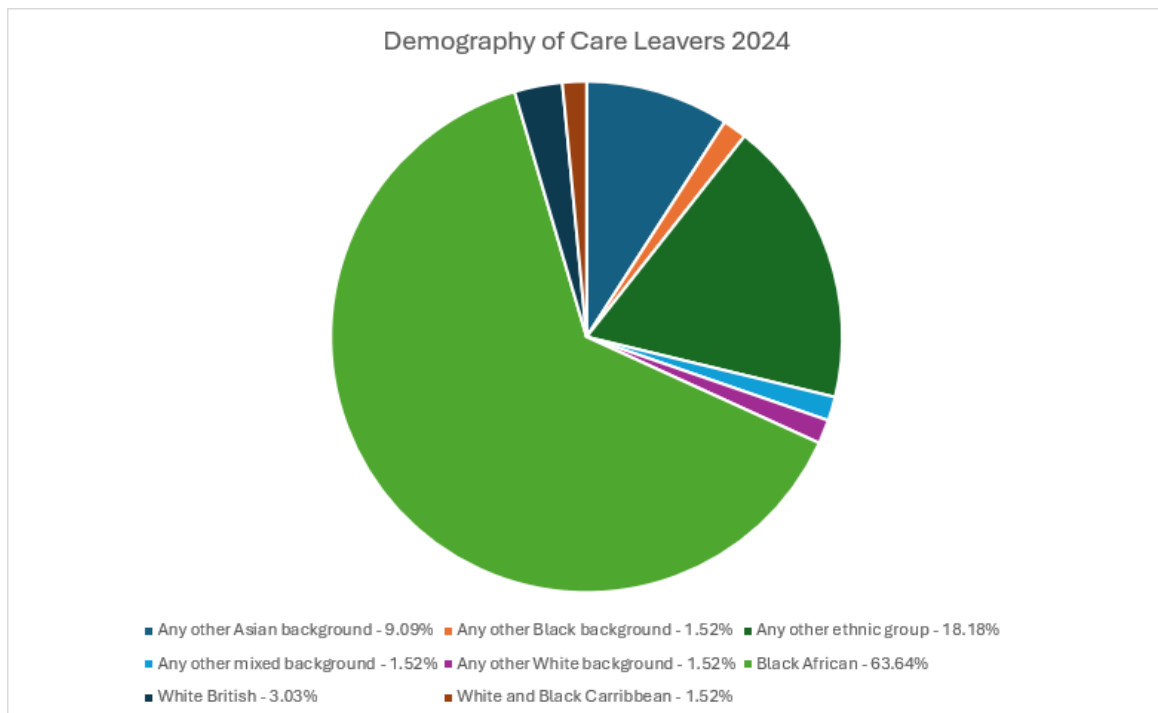
2.2 The total number of children and young people in care has declined as young people have become Care Leavers – the total of which has risen from 32 at the end of March 2020 to 55 at the same point in 2024.



2.3 In terms of sufficiency of accommodation, the total number of children and young people provided homes has remained relatively stable. Taking both children in care, and care leavers together, the total number in accommodation at the end of March 2020 was 56, rising to 68 in 2023 and falling to 62 in 2024.

- 2.4 The most significant accommodation type used is semi-independent accommodation – reflecting the ages, needs and preferences of young people, and accounting for 60 per cent (37 actual) of placements in March 2024. Semi-independent living accommodation has provided the largest proportion of accommodation over the last five years. Other significant accommodation types are foster placements, and independent living – the latter being provided entirely within the City Corporation’s social housing stock.
- 2.5 Ensuring sufficient accommodation in the period ahead is likely to be shaped by changes evident over the last five years. Fewer children and young people are coming into the City Corporation’s care, and those coming into care from the resident community represent a growing proportion (albeit of a declining and small total). Among this group, needs are diverse.
- 2.6 Young people are transitioning from care to become care leavers. At the end of March 2024, 36 of 55 care leavers were in semi-independent living accommodation, and a further 12 lived in independent social tenancies. As young people move towards independence, the trajectory of demand and pressure for sufficiency will be the provision of accommodation supporting independence in adulthood.
- 2.7 Of those leaving care, over 90 per cent are young men. Our care leaver population is ethnically diverse. Two thirds are Black African, ten per cent Asian, five per cent White British or other White backgrounds and 20 per cent other ethnicities.

#### Ethnic Diversity of Care Leaves Population August 2024



- 2.8 Our approach is to meet the diverse needs of our children and young people, ensuring that they have the support of foster carers who know and understand their needs and journey. We seek to secure the best match for the young person in their placement

through reviewing and assessing a range of carers with similar backgrounds to the young people.

- 2.9 Due to the diverse nature of this population, it is important that we have a range of carers from varied backgrounds. Given the size and demography of the City of London, it is acknowledged that it is difficult to meet these needs within the Square Mile.

### 3 Securing homes for children in care

- 3.1 The City Corporation is committed to ensuring that children and young people can remain safely within their own families wherever this is consistent with maintaining and promoting their wellbeing. This is supported through a [“Think Family”](#) approach, whereby all services involved with the family work together to prevent children coming into care.
- 3.2 The number children and young people coming into care from the resident community is very low. Where children and young people need to come into care for their own safety and protection, we will seek to ensure that they remain placed as close as possible to their home, community and school, when this is in accordance with their best interests.
- 3.3 For young children who are unable to safely return to their birth or extended families, we will seek permanency for them through adoption. Where this is not possible the City Corporation has sought to achieve permanency through a Special Guardianship Order.
- 3.4 Most of those who come into - and leave - our care are unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people. They tend to be older young people from a diversity of backgrounds often with strong ethnic, cultural and religious identities. In managing the demand for support and the impact on our services, the City Corporation uses the protocol of the National Transfer Scheme to support transfer of responsibility to another authority where that is appropriate and possible.
- 3.5 Where children come into our care, the City Corporation commissions accommodation and support to meet these needs. We have established commissioning arrangements with Independent Foster Agencies, and we have utilised the Commissioning Alliance Framework to support our ability to meet need, secure quality and to mitigate the City Corporation’s limited capacity to shape and build the market of provision. We have also broadened our offer through support for kinship care – supporting the potential of relatives to provide homes for children and young people.
- 3.6 For those leaving our care, the City Corporation provides additional priority for social housing within its Housing Allocations Scheme. Young people are supported by their Leaving Care Social Worker who can draw upon a wider range of services such as the Tenancy Support Team.
- 3.7 We are committed to a continuing programme of social housing development to provide movement within our housing stock, and new homes for those in high housing need. In doing so we continue to provide social tenancies to those leaving care to ensure secure, safe and affordable homes. However, we recognise the competing

demands and needs for social housing, and consequently the need for the City Corporation to explore a wider offer to support independence and the transition to independent adulthood.

3.8 The City Corporation also participates in regional schemes and collaboration to ensure access to specialist provision – such as secure accommodation – should such a need arise.

3.9 Ninety per cent of provision for children in care or for care leavers not in independent tenancies, is within London, with the majority in the North West London subregion. Placements outside of London are specialist residential placements, of semi-independent placements, where the location reflects the preference of the young person.

3.10 Our approach to commissioning services for children in care and care leavers continues to be shaped by the level and characteristics of need we respond to, by best practice and opportunities for collaboration or share approaches, by market supply and by the voices of children and young people.

3.11 As set out, demand is low and differs from patterns in other local authorities due to the high proportion of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children supported. There are very limited opportunities to meet need within the City, although our social housing stock here, and across six other London local authorities provide opportunities for move on into independent living.

3.12 Our strategic approach to meeting need assumes that:

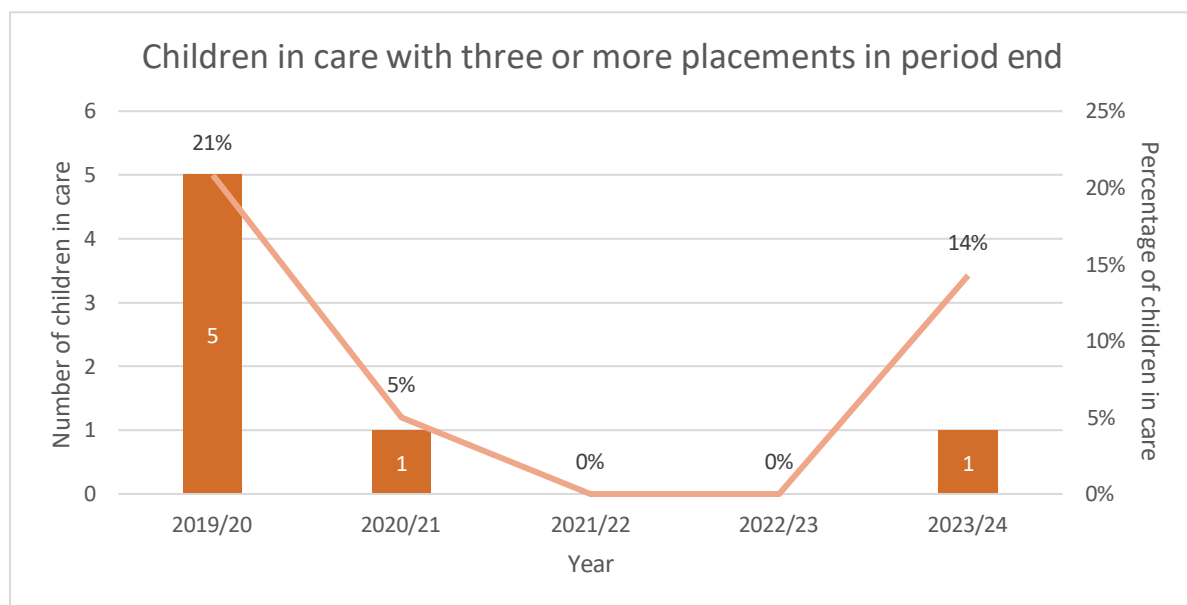
- **Foster care placements** will usually be best for looked after children who are under the age of 18 (except the youngest children, where adoption may be best).
- The option of **remaining in a successful foster care placement** should be considered for older children: we are committed to providing continuity for children beyond 18 wherever possible.
- **Unregulated Supported Accommodation** will not be used for anyone under 18 years old. Those aged between 16 and 18 years must be placed in Ofsted regulated accommodation.
- **Semi-independent living** (Ofsted registered and regulated) may be suitable for older children in care, but for 16-18 year-olds (subject to assessment) this may require features such as 24/7 onsite staffing and access to specialist support.
- **Semi-independent living** can be good alternative option to foster care for young people leaving care and Unaccompanied Single Children (UASC).

3.13 In addition to the above, it also assumes that:

- Provision in or near the City of London wherever possible, may be best for children with a local connection.
- In seeking a suitable home we will take into account the individual's ethnic, cultural and/or religious identity.



3.14 Our approach has delivered improved stability for our children in care. In 2019/20 five of our children in care (21 per cent) had three or more placements in the period. Since then just one child in 2020/21 and 2023/24 had three or more placements, and zero children in the years between.



### Options assessment

3.15 The City Corporation focusses on six key criteria in making our initial options assessment in securing a home:

1. *Are placements available in the City of London or within neighbouring areas?* This is beneficial for some children.
2. *Are placements subject to regular and rigorous quality checking?*
3. *Does our approach to placements provide us with enough capacity of the right sort to meet changing need?*
4. *Does our approach meet the diverse needs of our children and young people?*  
Recognising that this is not going to be possible within the City of London itself.
5. *Does our approach provide stability, and minimise placement breakdown?* This is difficult to assess directly. For us, if we are meeting criteria 1-4, then placements will tend to be stable, so long as they are supported by good social work practice and robust provider support
6. *Do placements provide 'value for money'?* How do the costs compare with alternatives of similar or better quality and with those of other local authorities?

3.16 We remain flexible in our approach, so that we are not exclusively reliant on one option, so that we manage risk appropriately, and can meet the diverse needs of the children and young people looked after and leaving care.

## Purchasing

- 3.17 The City Corporation accesses the Commissioning Alliance’s framework for sourcing and purchasing of Children’s Placements via the CarePlace portal. This framework provides access to Foster Care, Supported Living, Residential Placements and Family Assessment Centre provision.
- 3.18 This framework has a set of Dynamic Purchasing Vehicles (DPV) which hold a panel of pre-qualified and experienced care providers which have been pre-approved and appointed in accordance with national procurement governance and regulatory body requirements. The framework also provides a complete package of administrative tasks, quality assurance, monitoring functions and offers the best value for money. In addition, the Commissioning Alliance also manages a series of monthly referral and provider forums to discuss placement quality and feedback on the framework in collaboration with both Local Authority and residential, IFA and SIL provider members.
- 3.19 Additional City of London quality assurance approaches are also in place through the implementation of our senior leadership visit programme and regular quality assurance review meetings with providers, which take place either quarterly, bi-annually, or annually dependent on the number of residents placed with the respective provider and the level of complexity of the placement.
- 3.20 Through the Commissioning Alliance, placements for children and young people are commissioned as set out below:
- **For Foster Care:** Our primary approach to sourcing Foster Care Placements is through CarePlace to secure foster placements who are registered with Independent Fostering Agencies. We will seek to secure foster carers who are willing to enter ‘staying put’ arrangements to provide stability for those leaving care and transitioning to adulthood to ensure that they are as readily prepared in an environment positively comparable to their peers. This period of transition utilises existing support networks to avoid social exclusion and avoid possible housing and tenancy breakdown.
  - **For semi-independent living:** Through the Commissioning Alliance, we procure semi-independent living appropriate to individual needs as this is the preferred option of UASCs. The City Corporation’s Commissioning Team work closely with the Commissioning Alliance and existing placement providers in the process of Ofsted registration for semi-independent living and the subsequent Quality Standards, which came into force in October 2023. For unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people in semi-independent accommodation, the City pays accommodation, support and agreed subsistence costs as required by legislation and up to the point they have been given status to remain and become eligible for State Benefits. Where required, any rent subsidies or top ups are negotiated with the young person and Semi-independent providers on an individual basis.

Quality and diligence checks continue to be made on the services being provided by the semi-independent provision in relation to the accommodation, quality of support

being offered to young people in respect of life skills, health, cultural needs, education and accessibility to facilities, such as Mosques, Churches, shops and leisure facilities.

- **For Residential Care:** We aim to secure placements through the Commissioning Alliance portal, which assures full adherence to current regulatory frameworks and requirements. Where the Commissioning Alliance provision is unable fulfil the placement referral – for issues of complexity or supply for instance – accommodation placements are searched and sourced directly by City Corporation with the implementation of a full and robust due diligence process.
- **For residential placements with education provision:** these are sourced directly by City Corporation and contracted through the National Schools and Colleges Contract template, with the City Corporation’s Virtual School Head providing support to quality assure provision.
- **For SEND:** SEND placements are sourced through the Commissioning Alliance SEND Brokerage Team. Referrals are sent to them directly and they will conduct a search. For resilience and to mitigate risk, the City Corporation will often run a parallel search to this, ensuring that providers meet standards.
- **For Family Assessment Centres:** Family Assessment placements will be sourced through the Commissioning Alliance CarePlace framework.
- **Adoption:** Adoption is generally the best option for younger children who cannot return to their birth or extended families. The City of London is a founding Member of the Coram Ambitious for Adoption Regional Adoption Agency; this is in place until 2029.
- **Out of hours emergency placements:** Our children’s social care out of hours provision is delivered in partnership with the London Borough of Hackney who may, when required, place a child or young person outside of office hours in the first instance. Hackney utilises the same stringent placement protocols and criteria as the City of London and has access to the Corporation’s client records system and works closely with the City children’s duty team to ensure a co-ordinated and smooth placement handover.
- **Secure Accommodation:** The City Corporation is part of the London’s Secure Accommodation Project – a regional consortium - for the provision of secure accommodation.

3.21 The City Corporation recognises the importance of quality support in securing success, and strengthens this approach by including:

- A high level of support for all children and young people in placement from their social worker, Independent Reviewing Officer, commissioned advocacy/Independent Visitor and the Virtual School.
- Immigration support through our partnership with the South London Refugee Association [Immigration support pledge](#) which supports children in care and care leavers to access quality legal support and to enable those who are eligible to apply for permanent status and British citizenship.

*'...reviewers saw consistently that care experienced young people in the City of London have somewhere secure and stable to live that best meets their needs, where they feel safe and where they can develop their independence skills. This was consolidated by many of the young people having been supported to secure refugee status and leave to remain in the UK for 5 years.'*

Aidhour practice review – July 2024

## 4 Leaving Care and Moving On

- 4.1 The City Corporation has a statutory duty to provide accommodation and care for young people that are looked after up to 18 years, and to provide support to Care Leavers up to the age of 25 years.
- 4.2 We recognise the diversity and individuality of need in the journey to independence and life after care.
- 4.3 Whatever their current situation, we will ensure care leavers in the City are prepared for life after care. An individual pathway plan will be agreed to help prepare young people for independence in accordance with their needs.
- 4.4 The transition to adulthood for all young people, including care leavers, is about progression. For care leavers, this may be a series of small or larger steps, both preparing for independence, leaving care and beyond. Some young people may get their own independent accommodation at 18 years, which is recognised as a very young age to live alone. If this is the case, they will continue to need support as they develop their skills, learn from experience and react to their changing life circumstances.
- 4.5 The emotional wellbeing of young people leaving care is a critical consideration. Alongside support in relation to managing their accommodation, we will continue to offer emotional and practical support, up to the age of 25 years, to ensure that our care leavers, often living on a tight budget and living alone, can manage in a tenancy and engage positively with their community. Our Care Leavers retain their allocated Social Workers once they turn 18 years.
- 4.6 Young people also need timely and easy to understand information about what will happen when they leave care, the type of accommodation they should expect, where

they might live and the pros and cons of various options. When young people are ready to leave care in the City, they will be provided with practical information about moving on and supported to secure their moving on accommodation. This is detailed within the accessible [Care Leaver Offer](#) that contains a specific section on [housing](#).

- 4.7 Our young people tell us they want permanent homes. They often want homes in specific locations – reflecting the geography of their existing accommodation or other personal factors.
- 4.8 Our social housing offer provides good quality, secure and affordable homes. The demand for such homes is high for the City Corporation, across a range of needs groups. Our care leavers are predominantly eligible for a studio flat – offered from a housing stock sits within estates across seven inner London authorities – including the City. Availability of suitable vacancies can be a constraint, and we anticipate this may lead to longer waits and the continuation of high-cost placement for longer than necessary. For some the geography of our housing stock, or the limitations of a studio flat can be a barrier.
- 4.9 To mitigate the City Corporation will broaden its offer, developing approaches based on the approaches and learning of other local authorities, such as shared accommodation and support to secure private sector tenancies through initiatives such as rent deposit and rent guarantor schemes. These will add to our social housing offer, which will be underpinned by continued housing development.

## 5 Our Plan

Priority	Action	Outcome/Impact
Child and young person centred approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure children and young people are at the centre of every decision, with regards to their well-being, safety and outcomes</li> <li>• Provide choice and address what matters most to young people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Placement satisfaction amongst children and young people</li> <li>• Children and young people are actively involved within decision making and their voice is heard</li> </ul>
Quality and stability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secure high quality placement provision through our engagement with collaborative commissioning approaches, and directly with the market</li> <li>• Use feedback from children and young people, Children in Care Council volunteers and social workers to review placement quality and suitability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Placement satisfaction amongst children and young people</li> <li>• Reduced placement disruption</li> </ul>

Diversity and cultural sensitivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflect cultural sensitivities when informing placement provision, involving Children and Young People (CYP) in decision making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Placement satisfaction amongst children and young people</li> <li>• Reduced placement disruption</li> </ul>
Move-on and independence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop supported shared housing offer</li> <li>• Develop private rented access scheme offer</li> <li>• Consider provider market approaches which may support CYP and care leavers towards independence and educational and employment opportunities and tenancy sustainability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Successful transition to independence and improved life skills</li> </ul>
Collaboration and Partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with neighbouring local authorities to achieve greater collaboration on a regional and sub-regional basis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater levels of placement choice and possible economies of scale</li> </ul>

## 6 Reviewing this Strategy

- 6.1 This strategy sets out our commissioning intentions to ensure that we have sufficient placements of the right kind and quality to meet the needs of children and young people in care within the City of London.
- 6.2 Central to this strategy is children and young people and the support they need to thrive, develop and reach their full potential. This means considering their health, education, connectedness and emotional wellbeing when reviewing how we meet their placement needs.
- 6.3 We are committed to ensuring that children and young people have their views taken into consideration; this will be achieved by consultation through and engagement with forums including the Children in Care Council.
- 6.4 To ensure that progress against the action plan is measured and receives full support, updates on the implementation of Our Plan will be reported at the following regular Management Group meetings:
  - Strategic Placements Group
  - Children’s Senior Management Team
  - Achieving Excellence Board
  - Safeguarding Sub Committee – reporting to City Members.
- 6.5 The strategy will be reviewed annually to ensure that our approach and commissioning intentions are effectively meeting the needs of children looked after in the City of London. Review will also take account of any complaints or complements regarding placements.
- 6.6 This updated strategy runs until 2027, and will be reviewed annually, with the next review in September 2025.