

City of London Corporation Committee Report

Committee: Community and Children's Services Committee	Dated: 16/01/2025
Subject: Ofsted Inspection of City of London Children's Services 2024	Public report: For Information
This proposal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • delivers Corporate Plan 2024-29 outcomes • provides statutory duties 	Providing Excellent Services Diverse Engaged Communities
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	No
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?	No
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Summary

Ofsted conducted a short inspection of Children's Social Care services between 23 and 27 September 2024, under the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework.

Ofsted's findings were published on 5 November 2024. This report summarises key findings and appends Ofsted's findings in full. It also includes our response to two recommendations made by Ofsted to further improve the service.

The City of London's Children Social Care service received an overall judgement of 'Outstanding'.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Background

1. Inspections of Children's Social Care focus on the effectiveness of local authority services and arrangements.
2. The inspections assess the effectiveness of local authority services in several critical areas, including the protection and support of children, the experiences and progress of those in care – regardless of their living situation – and the arrangements for achieving permanence, such as adoption. Inspections also evaluate the experiences of care leavers and examine the effectiveness of leadership and management, focusing on their impact on the lives of children and young people, as well as the quality of professional practice.
3. The last full inspection of Children's Social Care at the City of London took place in March 2020, and the City of London received an overall 'Outstanding' judgement.
4. Ofsted conducted a focused visit on the 'front door' – the service that receives initial contacts and referrals – on 8 and 9 November 2022. Inspectors stated that this focus visit "found high-quality practice which ensures that children benefit from effective and responsive front door services".

Current Position

Ofsted findings

5. The following summarises the specific findings from the 2024 inspection report.

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection: Good

6. Children and families in the City of London receive timely Early Help services through effective multi-agency partnerships. Assessments are thorough and sensitive to diverse needs, with strong input from partners to strengthen family outcomes.
7. Social workers maintain meaningful relationships with children through regular visits and comprehensive assessments. They effectively hear and understand children's voices and ensure that children's needs are met appropriately.
8. Child protection processes are generally effective, with prompt risk assessment and multi-agency responses. While most protection plans are robust, some cases lack sufficient contingency planning and timely intervention.

9. The service excels in supporting vulnerable groups, particularly unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and disabled children. Oversight of legal proceedings, education welfare, and specialist support services is maintained, though some monitoring systems need improvement.

The experiences and progress of children in care: Outstanding

10. The City Corporation provides outstanding care services that significantly improve children's lives. Most children entering care are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who receive efficient support from skilled social workers.
11. Children benefit from stable homes and comprehensive care plans that reflect their individual needs. Their permanence plans progress quickly, with experienced managers providing excellent oversight. Regular reviews involve children's participation, and an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) provides consistent follow-up and warm communication about their progress.
12. Social workers maintain strong, stable relationships with children, visiting regularly and advocating effectively on their behalf. Children receive good support for their education, health, and emotional wellbeing, with high aspirations maintained by all professionals involved. The virtual school provides extensive support, leading to good educational progress.
13. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children receive excellent support, including timely legal advice and help in accessing education and community services. Children with disabilities benefit from well-coordinated support and early transition planning. While the authority has few fostered or adopted children, robust commissioning and quality assurance processes ensure appropriate placements through regional partnerships.

The experiences and progress of care leavers: Outstanding

14. Care leavers, primarily unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, benefit from stable relationships with social workers who help them achieve their ambitions through effective pathway plans that respect their religious and cultural needs.
15. Social workers are attentive to care leavers' emotional wellbeing and quickly address any risks or vulnerabilities. Young people have access to a comprehensive web-based local offer in multiple languages, and senior leaders provide monthly online sessions about rights and entitlements with support from various services.
16. Care leavers are well-supported with housing, living primarily in supported accommodation where they learn independence skills. They receive priority status for City of London housing and are guaranteed tenancy by age 25. The virtual school actively supports their education and employment prospects, with workers showing creativity in addressing individual communication needs.

17. Young people are encouraged to participate in various activities through the Children in Care Council, including sports and recreational opportunities. Social workers maintain regular contact beyond the age of 25, providing consistent support through various communication methods. Care leavers who become parents receive excellent support, with child protection processes implemented when necessary.

The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families: Outstanding

18. The City of London Corporation demonstrates strong leadership through its Town Clerk, lead Committee Member for Children's Services, and Director of Children's Services, who actively champion children's needs. Corporate leaders maintain effective oversight and use unique political connections to enhance services.

19. Partnership working is robust, with the City Corporation sharing its emergency duty service with the London Borough of Hackney.

20. The service maintains an open learning culture under the Director of Children's Services' leadership, promoting workforce skills and different perspectives.

21. The Children in Care Council actively influences service delivery, with strong corporate parenting extending to all care leavers up to age 25.

22. The workforce benefits from manageable caseloads and effective support, enabling strong relationships with children and families. Senior leaders maintain a focus on anti-racist practice and diversity, with regular auditing and moderation processes ensuring service quality.

Proposals

23. In addition to the report's findings and overall Outstanding judgement, the City Corporation received two recommendations to further improve services:

- Impact for children living in circumstances where there is domestic abuse.
- The response to children who experience exploitation and youth violence.

24. Please see below for our response to these two recommendations.

Domestic Abuse

25. The City Corporation addresses domestic abuse through multiple approaches. The Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Harassment (DASH) assessment tool is used by Social Care and Early Help services, alongside Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) referrals and local voluntary sector engagement. Family Therapy Services are available to families and individuals, while specialised programmes can be purchased for specific cultural or linguistic needs. Children affected by domestic violence receive direct support from in-house workers and through commissioned mentoring and confidence-building activities.

Family Therapy Clinic Offer Improvement

26. From January to June 2025, we will ensure that each child and family experiencing domestic abuse is automatically referred to the Family Therapy Clinic – it will be an opt-out offer. The process will be discussed between the lead clinician and the team manager (this was planned for end of November 2024, but has been moved back as the contract has yet to be awarded).

Review of Threshold/ Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) Application for Domestic Abuse

27. Children's Social Care and Early Help services have been working with the City of London Police in response to threshold and joint working. At our last joint meeting in November 2024, we agreed to undertake a review of our thresholds and MASH application for domestic abuse (a retrospective of 2024–2025). This will look at the experience of children, and include use of the DASH tool and impact assessment.

28. MASH protocols will be updated following the review, and the work with the clinic will be completed by the end of March 2025.

Managing Parental Conflict

29. In the last quarter of 2024/25 Children's Services staff are participating in training for managing parental conflict. This had previously been undertaken by the service team a couple of years ago, and the refresher will reach current staff and those new in post.

A Project Lead

30. There are two current service area leads in the Children's Social Care and Early Help services – for children with disabilities, and for national social care review and reform. As a service, we have decided to undertake short-term projects instead of lead areas, barring the above which involve consistent involvement. A project lead will be sought for six months within the service. They will join the Head of Service as she facilitates the City of London Violence Against Women and Girls forum with statutory and community partners.

Care Leavers

31. Several of our care leavers are now fathers. There is Social Care/Early Help intervention by resident local authorities for the children in their jurisdiction. The team manager will review this cohort to assess the needs for intervention. As intimate partner conflict has featured in some situations, the team manager will bring their proposals to the Children's Senior Management Meeting for how the service can better support parenting and interpersonal relationships.

Testing Ourselves and the Impact of Our Work

32. The work detailed above will inform an audit to test out impact. This will take into account equalities and evidence across each of the protected characteristics, including care leavers.

Exploitation and Youth Violence

33. Ofsted found that our risk assessments were detailed and of excellent quality. The inspection team thought that specific tools would further help formulation of assessments and our response.
34. The *Adolescent Safeguarding Handbook* was relaunched in 2024. Our partners and City of London Police joined the launch. The handbook will be used consistently, and its use will be promoted and recorded.

Review of Local Authority Tools/Assessments

35. Tools and specialist risk assessments have been sought from the London Boroughs of Lambeth, Tower Hamlets, Hackney and Haringey. These will be reviewed by the Head of Service and the whole team to adapt to make the best use of the tools. Given that our work is often international, this will include a focus on protected characteristics, including care leavers. A final version will go to the Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) Panel in March 2025.

Review of MACE Panel

36. A review of the impact and membership of the MACE Panel will be undertaken from January to March 2025. Advice has been sought from the City and Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership. A specific invitation for the review will be given for the January and March MACE meetings. This will include a review of our work in light of the Pan-London MACE review from last year.

Exploitation and Serious Youth Violence Leads

37. A project lead will be identified within the team to work on exploitation and serious youth violence, for a six-month period. This lead will be responsible for inviting exploitation experts to team meetings and promoting use of the available tools.

Pan-London MACE Network

38. Attendance at the Pan-London MACE Network will be delegated to Team Manager if either the Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance or the Head of Children's Social Care and Early Help cannot attend. This will help the team stay abreast of learning and intelligence and feed this back into our system.

Testing Ourselves

39. Audit will be used to test the impact of the above work for children. A report was completed on MACE's work in June 2024 for the Safeguarding Sub-Committee. A similar report reviewing progress on the above will be submitted to the Children's Senior Management Team and then to the Safeguarding Sub-Committee in 2025 for oversight and challenge.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

- 40. Strategic implications – None identified
- 41. Financial implications – None identified
- 42. Resource implications – None identified
- 43. Legal implications – None identified
- 44. Risk implications – None identified
- 45. Equalities implications – None identified
- 46. Climate implications – None identified
- 47. Security implications – None identified

Conclusion

- 48. The City of London Corporation Children's Social Care services are 'outstanding'. Children and families receive timely and good-quality support that makes a difference to achieving positive outcomes. Further work continues to improve our service based on the two recommendations made by Ofsted.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Inspection of City of London local authority children's services full report

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