

City of London Corporation

Draft Childcare Policy

Supporting access to childcare: Childcare Accessibility Scheme

Introduction

Access to affordable, high-quality childcare supports the wellbeing and development of children and is essential to enabling parents and carers to work and to promoting economic stability.

The cost of childcare is a significant barrier – especially to low-income families. Many low-income parents struggle to meet childcare costs which make up an ever-increasing proportion of families' net income. High costs can lead parents (especially mothers) to reduce hours or exit the workforce - impacting both gender equality and household finances.

The City of London Corporation is committed to ensuring there is a sustainable supply of childcare provision in the Square Mile to meet the range of needs and demand for places, and to enable households on lower incomes to secure quality childcare that is accessible and affordable.

This commitment echoes that of the government – in recognising the vital role of affordable childcare to the wellbeing of children and families – but goes further in its support of families living in the Square Mile – particularly in the support of childcare provision for children aged 0-2 years. In doing so it helps those for whom additional childcare costs (and the limitations of government support) are a barrier to full time or additional working hours

Its delivery aligns with and supports the City Corporation's Early Help offer (services aimed at preventing the escalation of needs or risk). Early Years (universal services aimed at improving outcomes for all children) and our support for those children and young people with special educational needs and disability (SEND) support our commitment that children have the best start in life.

The policy also delivers the commitments in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan. This is by improving our public services and progressing social inclusion and social mobility for all. Its development and delivery are underpinned by the principles of fairness, equality of opportunity, reducing health inequalities and enhancing choice – recognising the constraints of the public purse, in targeting those families on a lower income.

The City of London is small in area. For some in our community, services – including childcare – that are closest to them may sit across our borders. Where we can enable access to such services we will. The City's childcare providers offer high quality services to those who live in the City, and to those who live in neighbouring authorities – contributing to their vibrancy and viability. However, the City Corporation – in line with its statutory duties and local authority capacity – should remain focused on delivery to the needs of its resident families, particularly those with greater needs.

The City Corporation's Childcare Accessibility Scheme will support access to 0-2 childcare, reflecting individual households' needs and circumstances to secure its commitments to families, young people and its wider corporate aims.

City of London Childcare support

1. Principles, duration and review

This policy seeks to support lower income families living in the City of London to access affordable, high-quality childcare supports.

Its principles seek to secure a fairer, more accessible and more equitable approach, and increase choice for City families.

This will be delivered through the Childcare Accessibility Scheme. However, changes to government policy and funding may require changes to delivery to ensure to continue to meet the principles set out.

The policy will be in place until 31 March 2029.

The policy will be subject to annual review to ensure the eligibility criteria remain relevant and in line with wider factors such as wage inflation.

2. City of London Childcare Accessibility Scheme

The City of London Childcare Accessibility Scheme aims to support resident families to access childcare. The purpose of childcare settings is to support children's early development and empower parents to make positive changes to their lives through work, training or family support.

The scheme works by providing funded childcare hours to eligible households. The scheme targets lower income households, and, additionally, children (regardless of household income) who have been identified as having additional needs – or where family members have such needs – and would benefit from an early education place.

The Scheme adds to the support provided to families by government (see below). In doing so it provides for eligible families who need more than the 15 or thirty hours of funded childcare provided, and for more than the limit of 38 weeks.

3. Scope - City of London Childcare Accessibility Scheme

Childcare: In England, the legal definition of childcare in terms of age is outlined in the Childcare Act 2006 and is defined as Early years provision referring to childcare for a young child, being a child from birth up to the 1st of September following their fifth birthday. Childcare is 'any form of care for a child, including education or any other supervised activity'. For the purposes of this policy, providers must be registered with Ofsted.

Beneficiaries: This policy is aimed at families who are resident within the City of London

Children: Children are described as from 3 months old to statutory school age (the term after a child's 5th birthday).

Lower income households: Households whose household income is £60,000 per annum or less (subject to review over the application of this policy)

Children with additional needs: Those identified by professional services, such as the Children's Social Care, Early Help and Early Years team.

4. Eligibility

Families are eligible for funded childcare if they meet any of the following criteria:

- Eligibility is for families with a household income of £60,000 p.a. net or less and savings not exceeding £16,000. * (Greater London average is £44,370 p.a. Inner London average is £64,100 p.a (ONS Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE)).
- A member or members of the family is/are supported by a professional or charitable organisation delivering services to the family over and above universal health and education services.
- Children have additional or special educational needs and/or disabilities, not supported by an Education, Health & Care Plan (EHCP).
- For families eligible for the Department for Education's Free Early Education Entitlement funding for 9 months old upwards from September 2025. City Childcare Accessibility Scheme funding may be applied for if more than 38 weeks childcare per year is required.

5. Application Process

- Families must complete an application form and provide proof of income and savings.
- Applications will be reviewed by the Education and Early Years team at the City of London Corporation, and families will be notified of their eligibility status within 30 days.
EEYServices@cityoflondon.gov.uk

6. Funded provision

- The City of London Childcare Accessibility Scheme will provide between 12 additional hours per week to 15 additional hours per week based on the needs of the child and requirements of the family.

7. Approved Childcare Providers

- Funded childcare must be provided by OFSTED registered providers. Therefore, providers must meet safeguarding, quality and health and safety standards and participate in ongoing quality improvement activity.
- Childcare providers delivering hours funded by the Childcare Accessibility Scheme must accept the City of London Corporation's contract for the Scheme.
- Providers *need not* be located in the City of London.

8. Payment Process

- City Childcare Accessibility Scheme funding will be paid directly to the childcare provider on behalf of the eligible family.
- Families must report any changes in income, savings or childcare arrangements to the Education and Early Years team City of London Corporation within 10 days of change of circumstance. Any subsequent overpayments will initiate recovery processes by the City of London Corporation.

9. Termination of funded hours

- City Childcare Accessibility Scheme funding may be terminated if a family no longer meets eligibility criteria, fails to report changes, or provides false information. Recovery of overpayment will be pursued by the City of London Corporation if failure to report or false information submitted is the cause of overpayment.
- Families will be given a 30-day notice before the termination of City of London Corporation funded childcare benefits.

10. Childcare Policy evaluation

- The City Corporation's Childcare Policy will be evaluated annually to assess its effectiveness and identify areas for improvement. This will be brought to the City of London Corporation's Community and Children's Services Committee for scrutiny.
- Feedback from families and providers will be collected to ensure the policy meets the needs of the community.

11. Sufficiency of childcare

Local authorities are encouraged to focus on increasing the capacity and sustainability of childcare providers in disadvantaged areas. This includes ensuring there are enough places for the least advantaged 0–2-year-olds to receive childcare. The supply and availability of childcare can change as providers enter and leave the market. The City of London Corporation produces a Childcare Sufficiency Assessment biannually to be satisfied that there is sufficient quality childcare provision available for the resident population. The Assessment can be found [here](#).

Government childcare support

11. Overview

Local authorities in the UK provide funded childcare to support families through the Department for Education's Free Early Education Entitlement. In the City of London, 100% of Department for Education funding is passed through by the Corporation to childcare providers on behalf of eligible families.

12. Early Years Entitlements for families:

- **15 hours** of free childcare per week for eligible working parents of children from 9 months up to 2 years old, which will be extended to **30 hours** from September 2025.
- **15 hours** of free childcare per week for eligible working parents of 2-year-old children, also extending to **30 hours** from September 2025.
- **15 hours** of free childcare per week for families of 2-year-olds receiving additional support.
- **Universal 15 hours** of free childcare per week for all 3 and 4-year-olds.
- An additional **15 hours** for working parents of 3 and 4-year-olds
- Eligibility is based on personal circumstances which can be found here [Check you're eligible for free childcare if you're working - GOV.UK](#)

13. Additional Funding available to 0-2 providers:

- **Disability Access Fund (DAF)** for eligible children accessing early years entitlements and in receipt of Disability Living Allowance.
- **Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP)** for eligible children, including children who are looked-after accessing early years entitlements.

- **Early Years Inclusion Fund** for additional staff or equipment to meet children's needs when an EHCP is not in place.

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