

# City of London

## Department of Community and Children's Services

### Participation Annual Report 2024-25

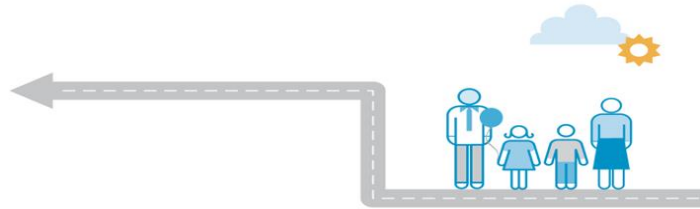


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## 1. Introduction

The 2007 Care Matters: Time for Change White Paper set out the then government's intention for all local authorities to establish a Children in Care Council to provide children and young people, in and leaving care, with additional opportunities to voice their views and experiences of the care system and increase their ability to influence and improve the services they receive from their local authority corporate parents.

The City of London has an established Children in Care Council which is coordinated by a Participation Officer, who sits within the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service. The remit of the participation worker is wider than coordinating the Children in Care Council meetings and holiday programmes and extends to supporting engagement in all opportunities and services available to children in care and care leavers, including supporting the Virtual School programme of activities.

The participation programme recognises that children and young people's views and experiences are central to service development, and that no policy or service which impacts children and young people should be developed or created without their input. Therefore, the participation offer seeks to engage children and young people in sharing their experiences and views to consult and codesign service delivery.

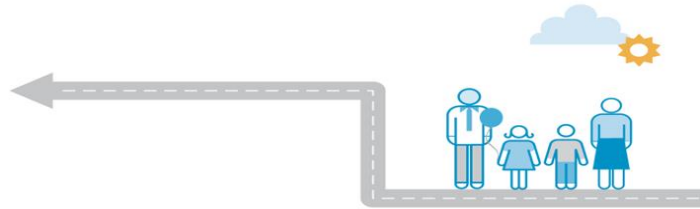
## 2. What is the Children in Care Council?

The City of London Children in Care Council (CiCC) is a group for all children and young people who are currently in care or have previously been in the care of the City of London.

It meets throughout the year to hear the views of children and young people on the services they receive, to receive suggestions to make services better, and to get involved in making changes and improvements. The voice of children and young people matter, and it is important the City of London know what they need and want from our services, so we can give them the best opportunities in life as their Corporate Parent.

Previously we have held meetings every half term to seek the views of children and young people and where needed consulted on specific pieces of policy and procedure. Attendance at these meetings was variable and where there was not a specific topic or issue to be reviewed some young people were not clear of the purpose of the meeting. Therefore, this year we have moved to a more informal model of engagement ensuring that there are regular spaces and times when young people know they can turn up meet other young people and members of staff and share how things are going for them. Through this we continue to receive regular feedback from children and young people and get a real sense of their day to day lives and where any challenges or barriers might be that we need to address.

Events are a mix of in person and online. In person sessions might be held at the Guildhall in the City of London or out in the community. We provide support for people to travel to attend and also make sure that we provide food and drinks, so young people don't need to worry about



missing any meals. We try and hold meetings at times that suit most people, generally early evening after school, college, or work.

Some young people don't necessarily want to attend an in person or online session, but we would still like to hear their views so will send out surveys or ask young people to try out new systems. We have a participation email address and WhatsApp group so young people can share their views and any thoughts they have on things that are important to them at any time.

We recognise that young people's time and contributions are valuable, and that sharing their experiences with us and hopes for the future isn't always easy. Therefore, when young people attend a more formal meeting, take part in a consultation event, or specific piece of work, we will recognise and thank them for this by providing a £20 online voucher.

Through the Children in Care Council children and young people also get opportunities to be part of bigger networks and groups such as the London Children in Care Council, and the Youth Parliament if they wish.

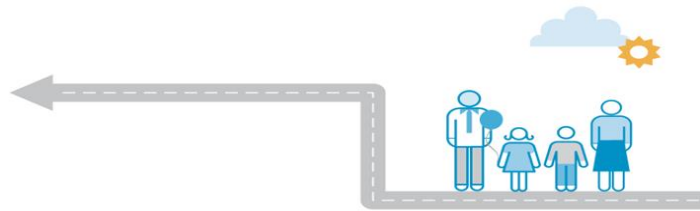
Participating with the Children in Care Council is more than just meetings and sharing views. Throughout the year we run lots of activities that are about having fun, getting to know new people, or keeping in touch with those they've met before, trying new things, learning new skills, and having different experiences. We have done many different activities across London and outside and are always keen to try exploring new things based on feedback from the group.

### **3. Membership and Inclusion**

The group is open to anyone who is in care or has been in care previously with the City of London. We work hard to make sure that everyone who meets these criteria is aware of the activities and opportunities available to them. We email those with an active email address, invite young people to join our Whatsapp group, ask social workers to promote events to young people they are working with, notify care and accommodation providers of activities taking place, and have a website to share information.

Given our numbers of children in care this year have been relatively low, and some of those live at a distance due to their specific needs, the main attendees of the Children in Care Council events have been care leavers. The majority of our care leavers are unaccompanied asylum seekers, so English is a second language so additional time needs to be factored into supporting conversation, and preparation needs to support consideration of inclusion especially for those who may have recently arrived in the country.

This year we have been supported by an Apprentice within the organisation to translate information and explanatory videos into Arabic, as this is the most widely spoken language within our cohort. This has been incredibly helpful to support understanding and promote inclusion with the group. However, the group is also a good space for young people to practice their English in an informal, friendly, and supportive environment.



Events that are organised also need to be mindful of religious observances within the group, meals need to be Halal, timings of events need to respect prayer times or provide space for these to be observed, periods of fasting need to be considered in respect of when to hold events and impact fasting may have on energy levels. We also ensure that young people are provided with plenty of time to arrive for events, given clear instructions of how to find locations, give google map locations, travel advice of nearest tube/bus stops etc, are given multiple reminders of events, and have contact details of the participation officer in case they have any problems.

We recognise that our cohort of care leavers are getting older and often have busy lives with jobs, social networks, and children of their own, so don't necessarily have time or need to attend the events and activities we put on. However, we continue to ensure that these opportunities are shared with them so they know there are options available to them at any time.

#### **4. Summary of Activity**

The participation programme aims to offer a range of spaces and activities across the year to engage children and young people in contributing their views, but also in developing a network of support from other young people, and in building confidence in trying new things and having different experiences.

##### **Online Information Sessions**

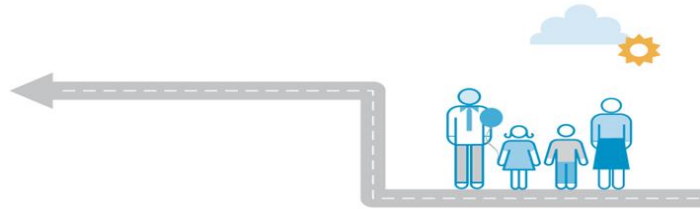
This year we have offered nine online information sessions. These are a space every 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday of the month from 4-5pm where the participation officer, Head of Service for Children's Social Care and Early Help are available online with an subject expert guest speaker to share information about a relevant topic and answer any questions or queries that young people may have. Topics have included; housing, free bus pass scheme, health, substances, money management, apprenticeships and employment, independent advocacy and independent visitor services, identity and relationships, and our new Caring Lie system.

Information is shared in advance about the topic, which are based on things which young people might have raised in other forums, or that social workers have expressed that young people are asking about or struggling with. Attendees can dip in and out of the session as they wish, ask questions about the topic or any other issue that they may need help with. Any query that can't be addressed in the session will be taken away by the participation officer and, or Head of Service and followed up and responded to outside of the online session.

These have been a well utilised space, which provide flexibility and a consistent space, which will continue to be delivered across the next year.

##### **Supper Club**

The formation of the supper club was based on feedback from the 2023-24 Annual Survey where some young people spoke about social isolation and not having a network to share celebrations or concerns with. Therefore, we developed a space where young people can come together each month and enjoy a meal. There is no expectation around attendance and young people are encouraged to suggest cuisines and ideas for future meals. Where possible we have



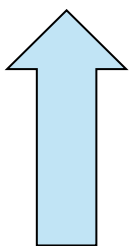
also tied this into celebratory events such as Eid and Christmas so that young people have a network to mark special occasions. We may also join it to an event such as the football team practice or theatre trips, young people are welcome to come to both or just one of the activities.

We have held 11 supper clubs in the last year in a range of locations; central London, Shoreditch, Harrow, Hammersmith, Brick Lane. These make different meals more accessible to those who live in different locations across London and are not centred specifically around City as none of our children in care or care leavers live in the City. Young people have suggested a wide range of cuisines including; Italian, Thai, Lebanese, Steakhouse, Mexican, Caribbean, and Malaysian.

The supper club has been well attended throughout the year. There was a decline in attendance during the winter months, which when the nights are dark earlier and the weather is cold can be expected. However, we continue to hold the space as it is important for young people to know it is consistently available to them when they need it. Social workers have also enjoyed attending the supper club so that they can spend more time with young people and enjoy group activities together.

### Residential Trip

From the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> July we took 7 young people on a sailing trip, this was supported by the Virtual School and Education Team. Over the 4 days the group sailed The Blue Mermaid ([Sea-Change Sailing Trust](#)) from Ramsgate to St Katherine's Dock in London. Learning lots of new skills, working together as a team, building confidence, developing their communication, and making lasting memories. Our group had an amazing and unique experience.



80% said that they were highly likely to sail again after their experience

60% felt that their confidence had increased after the trip

100% had more belief that they could do things for themselves

100% felt more confident in sailing

80% felt that they were better at listening to others

80% felt that they were better at sticking with things and finishing tasks

### Holiday Activities

During education half terms and extended holidays we try to offer a range of extra-curricular activities to promote social inclusion and opportunities to try new and different experiences. This year activities have included theatre trips, Go Karting, IFLY, F1 arcade, and a craft session. Whilst young people can often be busy revising, working, or taking time to rest during academic breaks we endeavour to offer activities that would interest them and provide a space to come together.



## 5. Impact and Achievements

This year we have continued to build upon consistent communication methods with young people to ensure all are made aware of the events and opportunities available to them. We have a regularly updated email distribution list so we can share information directly with young people, a private WhatsApp group which young people can request access to, so they receive information, and follow up phone calls from the participation officer to encourage and support attendance.

We have also developed a communication email group with keyworkers and carers to ensure that they are consistently receiving information about opportunities available so they can promote these with our young people and where needed support them to attend. Social workers continue to be proactive in promoting events and attending to support their young people.

Commissioning Review Meetings are being used to promote the participation offer and ensure that care providers and staff are aware of the offer and are encouraging and supporting young people to attend. We also continue to develop the Child in Care Council webpage based on feedback from young people and updating where new services are available. [Children in Care Council \(CiCC\) - City of London Family Information Service](#).

The introduction leaflet to explain the Children in Care Council and participation is part of the welcome to care bags that children receive when they first come into care.

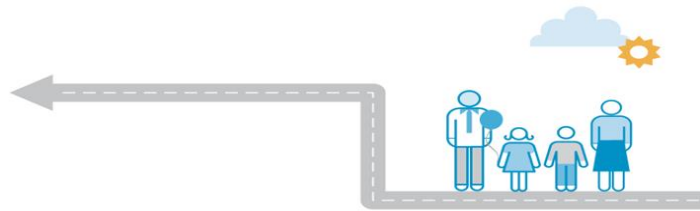
However, it is the feedback from children and young people that provide the best evidence as to whether the participation offer is effective and meaningful to children and young people. Throughout the year we have had over 123 attendances at Children in Care Council events, which given we have an average cohort of approximately 55 children in care and care leavers is promising.

Your dedication and energy have been super inspiring, and it's been amazing to see the difference you've made. I especially loved the City CiCC super club, the info sessions, as well as the whole range of other activities and entertainment you organised for us to enjoy throughout the last a few years.

I have enjoyed everything, especially how I could have lovely conversations with people.

The CiCC is always there for us, from day one of coming into care. You help us and take us out to do fun things. I would really miss it if it wasn't there. We have nice memories with you





## 6. Update on 2024-25 Priorities

**Young Inspectors** – we would like to train and support young people to get involved in the quality assurance of services provided to our children in care and care leavers. **This remains an outstanding area for development. There has been progress in terms of developing process around the offer and expectation, but greater consideration needs to be given to how young people are supported to understand the idea, trained to complete inspections, and provided with feedback from their work.**

**Supper Club** – to support links and relationships between our young people we are looking to establish a monthly supper club starting in April. **As outlined above this has been achieved and is being successful in its aims.**

**Communication Strategy** – we want to build on the progress of this year in terms of consistent communication to our children in care and care leavers. **As outlined above this has also been achieved and will continue to be maintained.**

## 7. Priorities for 2025-26

**Review of the Participation Officer Role** – At the end of this year the permanent participation officer left the role and currently there are interim cover arrangements in place. This provides an opportunity to review the remit of the role and consider where additional value could be added. There are currently small, commissioned services which could potentially sit under this role. Regardless of any changes to the role permanent recruitment will need to take place over the next year to provide stability and consistency going forward.

**Develop Online Resources for children and young people** – We would like to work on building a bank of videos and online resources to support the understanding of children when they come into care and reassuring them about the process and support available to them. This would be directed by young people based on their experiences on what they feel would have been helpful to know.

**Continue to develop and maintain the participation programme** – Ensure that the participation programme continues to meet the needs of children in care and care leavers, that it is responsive to changing need but maintains consistency and is accessible to all young people that need it. This includes ongoing work around the Young Inspectors programme.