

City of London Corporation Committee Report

Committees: Community and Children's Services – <i>For discussion</i> Safeguarding and SEND Sub-Committee – <i>For information</i>	Dated: 17/09/2025 13/10/2025
Subject: Families in the City update	Public report: For Discussion
This proposal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • delivers Corporate Plan 2024-29 outcomes • provides statutory duties 	Diverse engaged communities Providing excellent services
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?	N/A
Report of:	Judith Finlay, Executive Director of Community and Children's Services
Report author:	Rachel Talmage – Head of Children's Social Care and Early Help – Families in the City Programme Lead Hannah Dobbin – Families in the City Programme Manager

Summary

This report provides Members with an update on the Families in the City programme. Families in the City is the Department of Community and Children's Services (DCCS) and partners' response to national government reform around family help and Best Start Family Hubs for children and young people aged 0-19 years or up to 25 years for young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The programme will run in its current form until the end of March 2026.

Progress since the last update at the CCS Committee on 19 June includes delivery of Phase 1 of the development of the City of London Best Start Family Hub, which includes changes to services for 0-5-year-olds. A Department for Education (DfE) Development Grant is expected in October 2025, which focuses on the early years within the Best Start Family Hub.

Developments in the Families First Partnership workstream include workforce analysis to assess readiness for potential reform changes, and the review of related threshold and referral documents. Multi-agency working groups have been set up to focus on particular areas of the reforms. The approach to engaging residents and professionals across the Families in the City programme continues to evolve.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

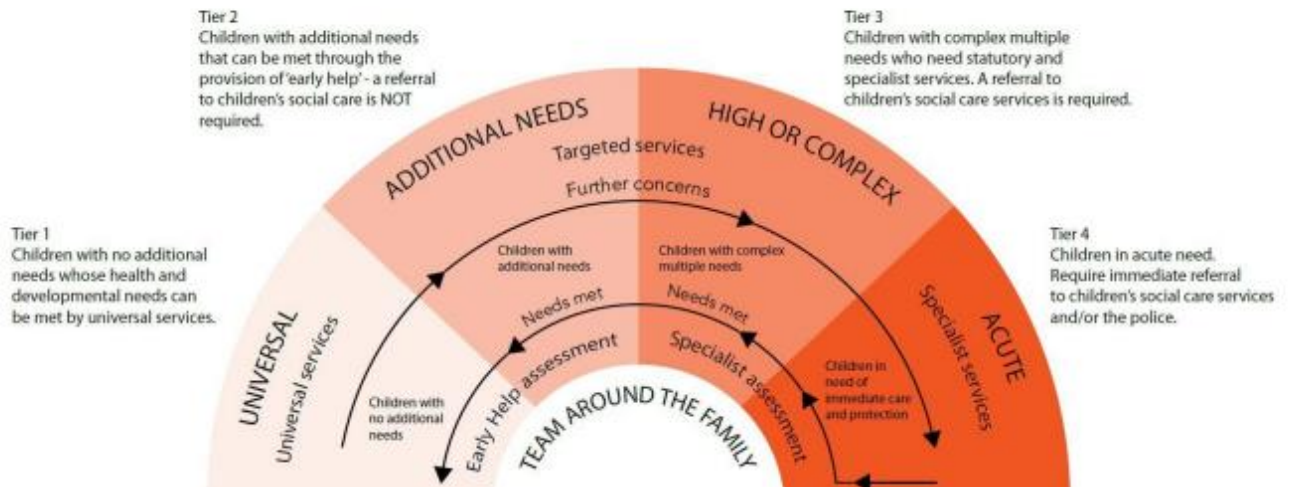
- Note the report.

Main Report

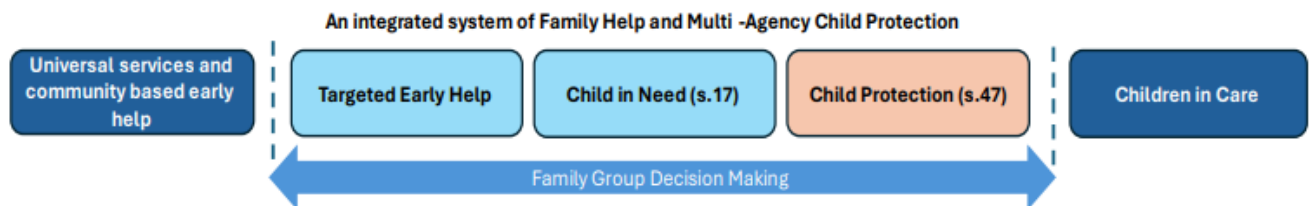
Background

1. National government reforms are driving transformational change in service delivery for children, young people and families. In July 2025, the DfE published its [‘Giving every child the best start in life’ strategy](#) which outlines how the Government will improve child development and ensure that all children have the chance to achieve and thrive. This aligns with the Government’s [10 Year Health Plan for England](#).
2. The strategy builds on previous national reform around family hubs and includes an action to develop a network of what this government is calling Best Start Family Hubs. Best Start Family Hubs focus on improving family services and support for young people aged 0-19, or 25 for young people with SEND, and aims to bring together professionals, including those from health and education, and “be open to all but based in areas where families need them most”. Best Start Family Hubs will also have a Children and Family Services professional specifically trained in working to support parents of children with additional needs. There will be a national Best Start in Life campaign in autumn.
3. Prior to this new strategy and the Best Start Family Hubs initiative, some local areas received funding from the DfE to develop Family Hubs. The City of London Corporation (City Corporation) was not one of those to receive funding.
4. The DfE’s Families First Partnership (FFP) programme requires local authorities to create an integrated system to “support more children to stay safely with their families and see better outcomes”. This involves the review and design of a Family Help system that merges Early Help and Children in Need systems.

5. The current continuum of need reflects four tier levels:



6. DfE sets out its vision for a reformed system as an integrated system, shown in the graphic below:



7. The reforms are an opportunity to build on our outstanding Children's Social Care and Early Help services. A focus on the best possible outcomes for children and families will be retained throughout the implementation of the Families in the City programme.

Current Position

8. The City Corporation continues to consider and develop our response to the national reform programme within the unique context of the City of London. A phased approach is being taken around the development of a City of London Best Start Family Hub to reflect the local context and continued publication of DfE guidance which is driving change at pace.
9. Phase 1 of the City of London Best Start Family Hub was implemented on 1 September 2025, to include:
- a virtual information and advice offer on our Family Information Service website. There are dedicated [Best Start Family Hub webpages](#) providing information on activities and services for children, young people and their families

- a pilot in-person support offer to help families navigate the Best Start Family Hub offer which is available from the Guildhall every Monday during September to December 2025. A telephone translator offer is available if needed to support families
- services continue to be delivered in-person at various sites – including our libraries and community centres - across the City of London.

10. The Best Start Family Hub brings services under one banner for 0-19 or 25 with SEND and their families. This includes information on and signposting to a range of support including those directly provided by the City Corporation's Children's Social Care and Early Help and Education and Early Years services, as well as commissioned providers, health and public health services. DfE requires a set of services to be included within a Best Start Family Hub including but not limited to:

- health visiting
- midwifery services
- breastfeeding support
- early language development and Home Learning Environment
- nutrition and weight management for 5-19-year-olds
- oral health improvement
- mental health services and support
- parenting support
- universal early help support
- targeted family support
- SEND services and activities, including the SEND Local Offer
- youth services

11. Relationships continue to be developed with the voluntary and community sector to ensure that the Best Start Family Hub promotes a wide range of activities and support for families in the City of London. This includes the Shoreditch Trust's We Connect in the City programme which provides a range of support for families at the Aldgate Centre every Friday.

12. Residents and professionals have been informed of developments through various channels including:

- information cascaded to professionals through Families in the City Board members – including representation from health, public health, education and libraries
- content on the Family Information Service website, which includes a translation function, and via social media channels
- content in City Corporation resident newsletters and partner communications – including Healthwatch City of London and the City Parent Carer Forum
- information shared directly with families in contact with our Education and Early Years, and Children's Social Care and Early Help services

13. The City Corporation website has been updated so families can find information about the Best Start Family Hub via the 'children and families' page. A link is provided to direct families to the Best Start Family Hub webpages.

14. The main practical change to services that will be experienced by families from 1 September is the relocation of services for 0-5-year-olds from The Aldgate School to other community settings in the City of London. The Education and Early Years service has worked closely with The Aldgate School to ensure that staff are aware of the changes and able to redirect families. Professionals who deliver services for 0-5s, including the health visitor and infant feeding lead, have communicated the change of venues to families who access their services.
15. A poster about the changes was produced and emailed or directly delivered to community and early years settings across the City of London including The Aldgate School, libraries, estate offices and nurseries. The poster has also been shared on all Family Information Service social media channels. A timetable of activities continues to be published on the Best Start Family Hub website, as well as printed and distributed at sites across the City of London, so families can check where and when services are running. The poster and timetable are provided in Appendix 1.
16. The DfE is due to publish guidance on Best Start Family Hubs branding so additional marketing assets will be produced when this has been received. Appropriately branded posters and leaflets promoting the Best Start Family Hub will be translated into Arabic, Bengali, Spanish, Ukrainian and Russian, and distributed at community settings across the City of London, as well as directly to families by professionals.
17. Phase 2 of the Best Start Family Hub development will be driven by national guidance and funding. The City Corporation has submitted a declaration of intent to receive a DfE Development Grant for newly-funded local authorities in October 2025. This covers October 2025 to March 2026 and is a non-ring fenced Section 31 Grant for revenue funding only (no capital). The Grant Determination Letter and single payment is expected in October 2025, subject to HM Treasury approval. The Development Grant has three key objectives to:
 - identify at least one Best Start Family Hub site by January 2026 from which to deliver parenting and home learning environment interventions
 - prepare to deliver parenting and home learning environment programmes from April 2026
 - develop ambitious Best Start in Life plans
18. Partners from the Education and Early Years, Children's Social Care and Early Help, and Public Health services are developing an implementation plan for the Development Grant and thinking about sustainability post March 2026.
19. Phase 2 of the development of the Best Start Family Hub will also include and reflect:
 - review and development of the online offer
 - review of the Monday in-person navigation support offer pilot from the Guildhall in December 2025
 - changes to commissioned services, such as youth services

- insight from an officer-led community space analysis (linked to the Health and Wellbeing Board) to identify potential opportunities around physical location/s for the Best Start Family Hub. However, this is set against the expectation that there will be no additional DfE capital funding
- involvement activity with young people and families through the Family Design Lab and existing groups
- further DfE guidance
- alignment with FFP reform

20. The FFP development workstream continues to develop in response to national government reform. A top-line timeline has been agreed at the Families in the City Board:

- Year 1 – March 2025 to March 2026
 - Assess readiness for reform including workforce analysis and data/performance reporting.
 - Update thresholds documents and multi-agency referral form.
 - Run FFP co-design working groups for professionals including on: Family Help, Multi-agency Child Protection Teams and Family Group Decision Making.
 - Involvement of families through the Family Design Lab.
 - Options paper to the Families in the City Board by the end of 2025.
- Year 2 – April 2026 to March 2027
 - Phased approach to implementation, including changes to practice and workforce.
 - Implementation would need to involve appropriate HR, communications and marketing activities.
 - Evaluation of implemented reforms.
- Year 3 – April 2027 to March 2028
 - Full implementation.

21. The City Corporation has been compliant with DfE reporting requirements including the submission of a delivery plan in June 2025 and a DfE stakeholder meeting in July 2025. Consideration is being given to potential DfE data and performance monitoring changes but there will be further DfE guidance on this in November 2025.

22. Family engagement continues to be a focus for Families in the City. Existing insight and feedback have been collated to inform developments. A Family Design Lab was set up in June 2025 to provide a co-ordinated approach to involvement specifically for Families in the City. The design lab aims to bring the point of engagement forward in the development process so that, as the programme moves at pace, ideas can be tested with an engaged group of young people, parents and carers.

23. Young people, parents and carers who live in the City of London or access services for 0–25-year-olds and their families are invited to join the design lab and give consent to be contacted about involvement opportunities as they emerge throughout the programme. The design lab has been promoted in City of London community settings, City Corporation and partner newsletters and via the

Family Information Service social media channels. The design lab was also promoted at the Artizan Library community event in August.

24. Twelve adults have joined the design lab. There was low attendance at the initial welcome sessions for this group. New sessions will be planned and the use of WhatsApp will continue to be trialled as this is a method that residents have supported in other engagement activity.
25. Children and families have been involved in the design of a dragon image which features on the Best Start Family Hub webpage. Children at a creative session at Shoe Lane Library coloured in dragons and families attending the Artizan Library community event voted on their favourite colour palette.
26. We will continue to promote the design lab. As Families in the City continues, more focused areas for engagement will emerge from the reform implementation. This should enable us to offer more topic-based sessions. We can also explore targeted sessions with existing groups, such as the City Parent Carer Forum. We will seek to maximise opportunities around existing community events and groups to reach and engage residents across the City of London.
27. Involvement opportunities will also be explored for families who are not members of the design lab to ensure that wider engagement is offered, and feedback and ideas are captured.
28. Families in the City continues to report to elected Members through the CCS and Safeguarding and SEND Sub-Committees. Content has also been shared in the Director of Community and Children's Services' Members update.

Options

29. There are no options for the CCS Committee to consider.

Proposals

30. There are no proposals for the CCS Committee to consider.

Key Data

31. There is no key data for the CCS Committee to consider.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

32. The following strategic implications are relevant to this report.
 - **Strategic implications** – Families in the City aligns with objectives within the Corporate Plan 2024–2029 to deliver excellent services and a diverse, engaged community. It will align with the vision of the Children and Young People's Plan. The Early Help Strategy is due to be revised in 2026, and this will take into account Families in the City developments.

- **Financial implications** – Families in the City is using a DfE grant to fund the Programme Manager until the end of March 2026. The DfE Development Grant will focus on required deliverables from October 2025 to March 2026. Financial implications will remain monitored, and additional funding will need to be sought if necessary.
- **Resource implications** – these are still being assessed.
- **Legal implications** – developments will need to ensure that the City Corporation continues to deliver all statutory functions and requirements.
- **Risk implications** – a risk and issues log has been set up for the programme and will be reviewed at Families in the City Board meetings.
- **Equalities implications** – Equality Impact Assessments are being developed and will remain as live documents for the duration of the programme.
- **Climate implications** – none.
- **Security implications** – none.

Conclusion

33. Families in the City is progressing at pace, driven by national government reform. Partnership working remains crucial to implementation and the Families in the City Board will continue to facilitate already strong joined-up working. The Families in the City Board reports into the Children's Partnership Board which is chaired by the Executive Director of Community and Children's Services and brings together senior leaders, including those from the City of London Police, Health and Public Health, to retain strategic oversight of the programme delivery plan and risk and issues log. How we involve children, young people and their families will remain under review to ensure that we provide accessible engagement opportunities to inform developments.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – poster and timetable.

Background Papers

- 19 June 2025 - public paper updating Members on Families in the City.
- 5 May 2023 - public paper asking Members to note that an independent City of London Children's Centre Services Review would take place.
- 13 December 2023 - non-public paper on the City of London Children's Centre Services and Family Hub Development.
- 11 March 2024 - non-public paper on the City of London Children's Centre Services Review.
- 11 November 2024 - non-public paper providing an update on the City of London Children's Centre Services.

Rachel Talmage

Head of Children's Social Care and Early Help
and Families in the City Programme Lead

T: 020 3834 7622

E: rachel.talmage@cityoflondon.gov.uk

Hannah Dobbin

Families in the City Programme Manager

T: 020 3834 7622

E: hannah.dobbin@cityoflondon.gov.uk