

London Borough of Hackney Children and Families Service

Self Evaluation and Annual Report 2024/25

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Section 1: Introduction and Overview

Introduction by Councillor Anntoinette Bramble

Deputy Mayor of the London Borough of Hackney

As Cabinet Member for Education, Young People and Children's Social Care, I am honoured to champion our children and young people at every opportunity. I am also the chair of our Corporate Parenting Board, ensuring political support and oversight. This report covers our 2024/25 performance as well as a 6-month update, as at the end of September 2025, where data is available.

The July 2024 Ofsted ILACS inspection which found that *'support for vulnerable children and their families has greatly improved since the last inspection of children's services in 2019'* and our overall effectiveness was rated as 'good'. Whilst Ofsted gave our services an overall 'good' for our effectiveness, as highlighted in last year's Annual Report, we have more to do, particularly in relation to our offer to care leavers and to ensure we are consistently utilising return home interviews for children who have been missing from home or care. There have been a number of significant and innovative achievements made in this area over the last 12 months, of which, I am personally proud.

In July this year I was pleased to open our new Care Leavers Hub - *Sonder Space* - the then Minister for Children and Families Janet Daby, the Chief Executive, Cllr Sizer and DfE. This space provides a dedicated setting for Hackney care leavers to take part in a range of activities and to access practical advice and support. We will be opening a Children's Homes in the borough later in the year and continue to explore other opportunities to develop new homes for our care experienced children and young people. We have a comprehensive Care Leavers Improvement Plan in place and there is increased emphasis and resources dedicated to ensuring return home interviews are being conducted with improved effectiveness, consistency and engagement.

Our Children and Families Service, as with all Children's Services nationally, are responding to the Department for Education requirement for all local authorities to prepare for the implementation of the [Families First Partnership Reforms](#). The service has responded to the reforms with pace and enthusiasm and I have every confidence that we will seize and maximise all opportunities that the reforms present, including opportunities for co-design with children and families and building on our Systemic, Trauma-Informed, and Anti-Racist (STAR) Children & Education model.

The service continues to champion and implement its STAR (Systemic, Trauma-Informed and Anti-Racist) approach for Children and Education. Our anti-racist work continues to be transformative and is recognised by local authorities nationally. We continue our focus on work to effectively improve awareness and understanding of a systemic and trauma-informed approach across our children's social care, education and health systems.

Children in Hackney are our priority and 'Working Together for Every Child' is one of our three Mayoral Priorities and underlines our [Strategic Plan](#). I want to thank the Chief Executive, Dawn Carter-McDonald for her input and support. I also want to acknowledge our Cabinet, in particular Mayor Woodley, Cllr Fajana-Thomas (Cabinet member for Youth Justice and the Domestic Abuse Intervention Service), Cllr Etti, Cllr Williams and Corporate Parenting Board members Cllr Lynch and Patrick. I could not be prouder of the determination and dedication shown by all staff across the Service,

who strive to achieve the very best outcomes for our children and families in Hackney.

Our Local Context



43% of children live in poverty - third highest rate of child poverty in London



Approximately 4000 children in temporary accommodation



99% schools good or outstanding
100% of Children's Centres good or outstanding



Permanent School Exclusions rate of 0.1% in Secondary Schools



62% of 0–19 population are Black and Global Majority



Very low first time youth offending rate



High percentage of school surplus reception places



Large and growing Charedi population

Our Priorities



Proud to be Systemic, Trauma Informed and Anti-Racist (STAR)



Proud to work with partner agencies



Proud to support our workforce to flourish



Proud to listen to children and families



Proud to work together to keep children safe

Hackney Families First Partnership Programme

The Department for Education requires all local authorities to prepare for the implementation of the [Families First Partnership Reforms](#), bringing together targeted Early Help with statutory Child in Need services, alongside a multi-agency Child Protection service and making greater use of Family Group Decision Making.

We have established a Programme Team to lead in the delivery of the reforms, overseen by a multi-agency Partnership Families First Programme Board, chaired by the Group Director for Children and Education. We have developed a detailed Programme Delivery Plan and established six workstreams to deliver on each of the core aspects of the partnership reforms (Family Help, MASH & Multi Agency Child Protection Team (MACPT), Family Group Decision Making, Workforce, Strengthening our response to Extra-Familial Harm, and Data and Insight), taking place monthly.

We have dedicated time to engaging partner agencies, sharing collated learning from Pathfinder local authorities, to support our local thinking, with full engagement in each of the workstreams. We are engaging staff from September to December 2025, sharing information, responding to questions, and developing opportunities for engagement in co-design of the reforms. We have distilled key messages from family feedback, mapped community infrastructure organisations to support in co-design with children and families, and are planning our co-design approach. We are commissioning consultancy to develop our whole partnership approach to practice, building on our Systemic, Trauma-Informed, and Anti-Racist (STAR) Children & Education model.

We will be undertaking a Workforce Skills and confidence survey to shape our learning and development programme to support the reforms, with this programme including STAR training.

We will complete our scoping and design, ready to publish our updated Local Assessment Protocol and Hackney Wellbeing framework in March 2026. We will be taking a phased approach to the implementation of the new Family Help Service across the four neighbourhood areas, aligning with our Children and Family Hubs and Children's Centres, from April 2026.

Hackney's model of social work - Systemic, Trauma informed, Anti-Racist (STAR)

Hackney Children and Education Directorate has developed a practice model that underpins our approach in children's social care, education and health. The principles of this whole-system approach will be embedded in the way all professionals in Children and Education work with children and families. We have continued to develop our STAR practice model through the following learning and development opportunities:

- Refreshed our induction training offer to staff with a set of 3 induction modules which reflect our STAR practice model. These include: An introduction to Children and Families Services, Introduction to Systemic and Trauma Informed Practice and Introduction to Anti-Racist Practice.
- Commissioned the delivery of our Year 1 Foundation Level in Systemic Family Practice for the next three years.
- Completed our fourth year of our internally developed Anti-Racist Practice Programme of Reflective Learning.
- Provided Systems Leaders and Psychological Safety training for our senior leaders on driving change and promoting Anti-Racist Practice across our service. Further Psychological Safety training is scheduled.
- Rolled out a Leadership Programme to our Senior Social Workers, Team Managers and other managers within the service which includes focus on Anti-Racist Practice.
- We have celebrated the first cohort of our Realising Potential programme for Black and Global Majority colleagues with a second cohort scheduled for early 2026.
- We are exploring a bespoke Mentoring programme for Black and Global Majority staff across the directorate, joined up with Adult Social Care.
- We have introduced shadowing opportunities for staff with senior leaders to support staff development.
- We have refreshed our Workforce Strategy (2025-2028) to guide and shape our plans to support and develop our workforce for which Equality, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion is embedded within.
- Our Anti-Racist Practice Strategic Lead has started in post and is leading on our directorate Anti-Racist Practice Action Plan; Anti-Racist Practice Case Consultations commenced in November 2025.
- Plans are underway to create the cross-directorate Equality, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Board.
- We are in the process of commissioning a programme of training for staff across the directorate on systemic and trauma informed practice with anti-racist practice embedded within.



Section 2: The Experiences and Progress of Children Who Need Help and Protection



Early Help

Children and Family Hub Targeted and Universal Early Help

The Children and Family Hub transformation programme is a 'neighbourhood pairing' model of service delivery, aligning with the 8 primary care networks. The Hubs are a 'one stop shop' offering guidance and advice and support is available from conception up until age 19, or 25 for young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

Charedi families represent a significant proportion of our community and we provide early help support that is culturally sensitive to their needs. This includes the [Lubavitch Children's Centre](#) and Ezer Leyoldos and Biker Cholim which we commission to provide targeted Family Support. In 2024/25 there were 47 families (213 children) who accessed these services.

Strengths

- 1,397 families accessed Children and Family Hub Services including 10,240 children aged 0-4 and 2,518 children aged over 5 years.
- 607 families with children under 6 benefited from the Targeted Early Help Multi Agency Team (MAT) service. 91% saw reduced or non escalated risk, 10% were stepped up to statutory interventions. (Nb. *step up figure includes those stepped back up before intervention hence number exceeds 100%*).
- We have developed a shared set of [Early Help Practice Standards](#).
- Since the establishment of the Early Help Hub within MASH (September 2021) the team has seen an increase in self referrals and referrals from Police.

Next Steps

- Ensure consistent data reporting and quality assurance approaches across Early Help.
- Embed consistent Anti-Racist Practice across Early Help.
- We are entering a new phase of transformation; moving beyond Start for Life delivery to achieve Best Start Family Hubs readiness by April 2026.

Family Support Service

The Family Support Service includes Family Practitioners, Social Workers and Consultant Social Workers (team managers). Each team is managed by a qualified social worker which enables the Family Support Service to complete Child and Family Assessments (statutory assessments) as part of the intervention to support families. This means families do not have to be reallocated to a statutory social work team if there is an elevated concern or risk which requires a statutory assessment.

Family support interventions are voluntary, targeted, time-limited and delivered according to Early Help Practice Standards. This approach aims to intervene at the earliest opportunity, provide the right support, sustain progress and build resilience.

Strengths

- 2,065 Early Help Assessments were completed in 2024/25 with 724 of these completed by the Family Support Service.
- Between September 2024 and September 2025, 80% of initial visits took place within timescales, showing an increase from the previous year.
- We have placed increased emphasis on Family Feedback, and in the last year we received multiple emails from family members sharing their positive experiences of working with the service.

Next Steps

- Improve our timeliness of Early Help Assessments (72% of Early Help Assessments were completed within 30 working days between September 2024 and September 2025).
- A restructure of the Family Support Service is imminent and seeks to improve resilience and ease the transition to more integrated services through the Families First Partnership Reforms. The proposed model, with fewer but larger teams aligned with the four neighborhoods, will facilitate a move towards locality-based working and prepare the service for future changes.

Young Hackney

Young Hackney is the Council's integrated Early Help service for children aged 6-19 years old and up to 25 years if the young person has a special education need or disability. The service works with children to support their development and transition to adulthood by intervening early to address adolescent risk, develop prosocial behaviours and build resilience. Young Hackney workers ensure the voice of the young person and 'think family' are at the centre of practice, and are considerate of the strengths and needs of parents and carers as individual assessments and plans are developed.

Strengths

- The Young Hackney restructure has been successfully implemented and resources are aligned with the same locality model as the Children and Family Hubs. The service is now operating with a more streamlined model and is focusing the Young Hackney offer on adolescents.
- The restructure has enabled us to establish a detached outreach team to engage young people who may be vulnerable to extra-familial harm.
- An estimated total of 14,291 young people accessed universal services offered through Young Hackney during 2024/25, based on 154,419 named and anonymous attendances. Young Hackney delivered targeted support to 1,223 young people in 2024/25.
- We have developed 'HealthSpot City and Hackney' to provide a health offer within our centrally located Youth Hub (Forest Road).

Next Steps

- Auditing throughout the year has shown that direct work with children and Anti-Racist Practice is a strength, but that more work is needed to strengthen recording.
- Expanding the Healthspot support offer in line with the anticipated areas of focus for the new National Youth Strategy (e.g. addressing violence and misogyny, increasing access to employment).
- The service offer for Substance Misuse, Health and Wellbeing education is being reviewed to build capacity within schools to deliver high-quality PSHE themselves.

Youth Justice

The Youth Justice Service works with young people in Hackney, aged 10 - 17, who are arrested or convicted of crimes. The service undertakes youth justice work including bail and remand supervision and supervising young people who have been given community or custodial sentences. The overall number of young people entering the youth justice system for the first time in Hackney in 2024/25 was 68, a 33% increase from 51 young people in 2023/24. This remains below our statistical neighbours and above the national averages.

Strengths

- 82% of children who received a Triage disposal between April 2023 and March 2024 did not go on to commit another offence within the following year. This is consistent with data across the last seven years but represents a drop from the previous year (95%).
- Development of a multiagency health network to assess children's needs at the outset of their involvement in the youth justice system.
- The embedded Speech, Language, and Communication Team (SaLT) is working to create a neuro-affirmative service, and has delivered a successful Court project to support the judiciary to understand the needs of our children, and support accessible communication.

- The Prevention and Diversion Team, Metropolitan Police Service, [Mouth That Roars](#) and young people have developed a 'know your rights' QR code and video for use with children when they are stopped and searched by police.
- Turnaround and Engage are initiatives that provide support to children who have been arrested but have not yet entered the post court arena.
- Delivery of positive diversionary activity during carnival weekend (August 2025) which saw no arrests of children on open orders.
- In collaboration with our Youth Justice Police colleagues, we have successfully supported a pilot for the Deferred Prosecution Scheme that seeks to offer out of court dispersals to children who commit low level offences.

Next Steps

- Improve educational pathways for children post 16, involved in the Youth Justice System.
- Further development of Harmful Sexual Behaviour interventions and increase staff confidence in delivering these types of interventions.
- Ongoing work with the Metropolitan Police on the Safer Neighbourhood initiatives that seek to improve community relationships for children and young people in the borough.
- In line with [Child First principles](#) we are seeking to work closely with Young Hackney to offer targeted activities to children and young people on significant dates where we see an increase in offending.
- Continue to improve health data collection and analysis and maintain the multi agency health team and development of "Health Passports".
- Develop a Victim Strategy inline with the new HMIP inspection framework, embedding it within the service and partnership.

Domestic Abuse Intervention Service

The Domestic Abuse Intervention Service (DAIS) works with anyone experiencing domestic abuse or harming others through domestic abuse who is living in Hackney or the City of London aged 16 or over. In 2024/25 the number of contacts (1,799) received by DAIS rose by 35% from those received in 2023/24 (1,333) while the number of 'high risk' MARAC referrals remained largely in line with recent years (see below). This suggests improved recognition and response across the partnership of domestic abuse rather than a rise in the incidence of high-risk domestic abuse. DAIS' hypothesis is that the high level of training and consultation provided has led to increased confidence across the Hackney system. In 2024/25, 586 (46%) of the 1,286 clients who, after screening, were allocated within DAIS had children under the age of 18. Of those, 421 had children who required allocation in their own right within CFS.

Strengths

- DAIS provided training to 1,653 people across City and Hackney agencies, a 23% increase from the previous year. 100% of those trained reported improved confidence.

- DAIS created and, with the CAMHS Alliance, launched the [Hackney trauma-informed multi-agency guidance: responding to child victims of domestic abuse](#) the UK's only local guidance for practitioners in all sectors on how to identify and respond in a trauma-informed way to the impact of domestic abuse on children.
- DAIS achieved Respect accreditation of both its Domestic Abuse Prevention Programme and its Intensive Case Management approach. Hackney is the only Local Authority in the UK to have achieved dual accreditation for these two strands of intervention.
- DAIS successfully advocated for and obtained renewed funding from MOPAC for Hackney's Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy service delivered 'by and for' Black women of African and Caribbean heritage.

Next Steps

- More robust MARAC screening measures will be introduced (with support / consent from the wider professional system).
- DAIS will design with CFS colleagues and launch a bespoke programme approach for intervening with young people using violence in relationships.
- DAIS will design with VAWG partnership colleagues and launch a new tool for assessing Sexual Exploitation and a Sexual exploitation Strategy.

Young Carers

A Young Carer is defined as anyone under the age of 18 who provides emotional and practical support to a family member with a long term illness, disability or mental health condition. The Young Carers Team run fortnightly Young Carers groups in six Hackney secondary schools and weekly universal (open access) sessions at Forest Road and The Edge Youth Hubs. Children who are impacted by their caring responsibilities and/or have a higher level of need are supported by the Young Carers Team, Young Hackney's Early Help teams or through Children's Social Care. These Young Carers have personalised Young Carer Support Plans.

Strengths

- The Young Carers Team continue to raise awareness with partners and have run a number of 'show & share' sessions as a result there has been an increase in referrals from 15 to 74, over five times the number recorded the previous year.
- In 2024/25, a thematic audit on Young Carers was undertaken to deepen our understanding of this cohort. The information gained has informed our Young Carers Action Plan.

Next Steps

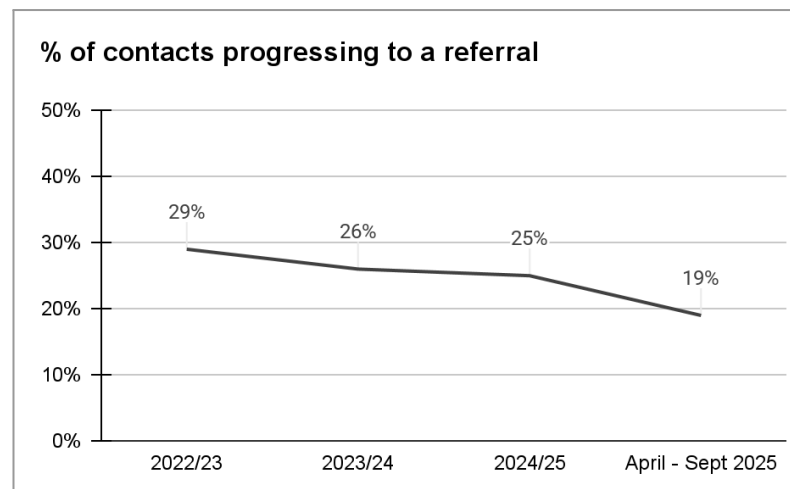
- Mosaic development is underway which will significantly improve the tracking, recording and reporting of Young Carers in the borough.



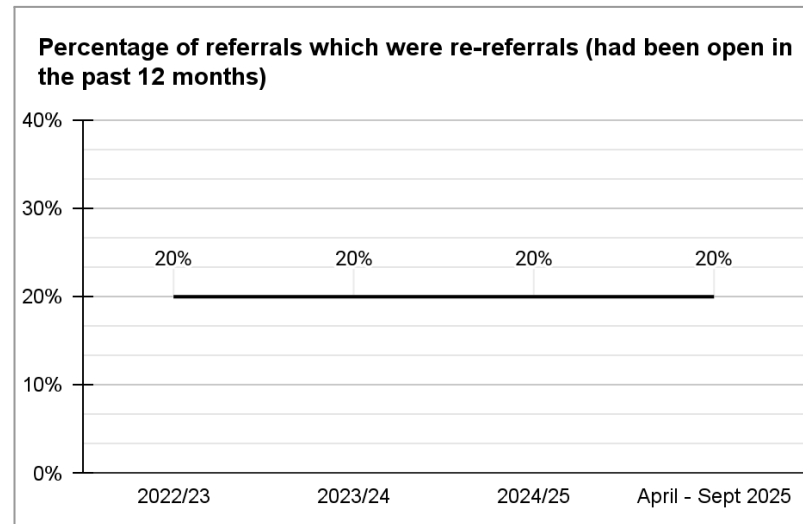
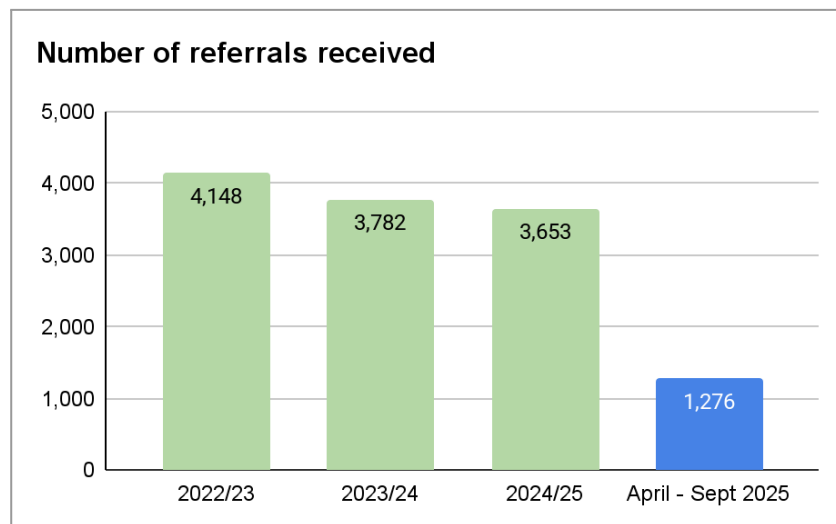
Identifying and responding to children's needs and appropriate thresholds

Contacts and Referrals

The number of contacts received has remained relatively consistent over the past three years (a difference of only 32 contacts between 2023/24 and 2024/25) and remains a decrease from pre-pandemic levels when contacts were at approximately 16,000 (2019/20). Hackney did not see the immediate rise in contact levels that many local authorities experienced following the pandemic.



There has been a year on year decrease in the number of referrals received since 2022/23 (8% decrease from 2022/23 to 2023/24 and a further 3% decrease between 2023/24 and 2024/25). This continued decrease indicates ongoing effective use of the consultation line and appropriate screening within the MASH.



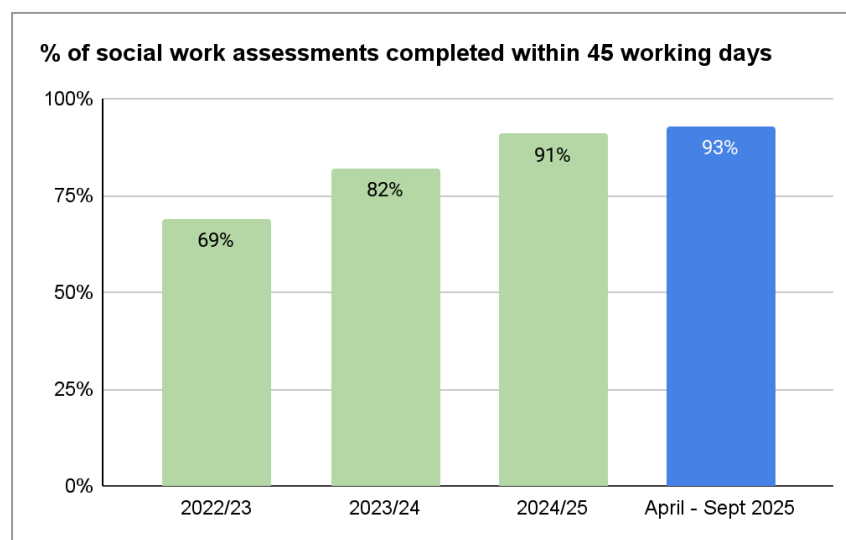
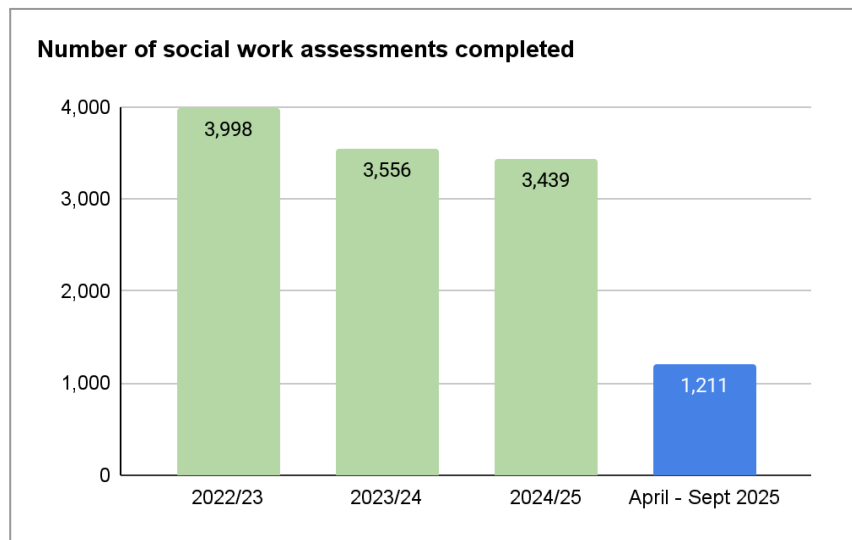
Strengths

- Since January 2025 Police referrals are now being shared with MASH within set timescales (Red 4hrs, Amber 24hrs, Green 72 hrs).
- The MASH consultation line received 332 requests from Education and 140 from Health partners since January 2025.
- From April 2025 there has been improved collaboration between MASH and DAIS including earlier joint working, reduced duplication, and safer information sharing and is a step towards creating "one front door".
- In early summer 2025, MASH introduced a new review process to streamline handling of new referrals on the same issue when these are received within three months. This approach avoids families having to tell their stories twice, avoiding the need to handle these in the same way as we would for a new referral contributing to the re-referral rate decreasing from 27% in April to 17% in October 2025..
- Co-location with CAMHS once a week since January 2025 has improved information sharing with a key partner agency.

Next Steps

- Strengthen the daily MASH meeting to increase agency participation in screening and decision making, including adult services and mental health.
- Strengthen co-location with partners - including with housing, benefit officers, CAMHS, and Turning Point.

Assessments



The volume of completed assessments also decreased in 2024/25 (3% lower than 2023/24) and in the year to date numbers are projected to remain lower than in previous years, aligning with the reduction in referrals. This reduction in referrals is having a positive impact showing sustained improvement in the timeliness of the completion of assessments.

Strengths

- The Statutory Children and Family Assessment rate has consistently fallen, dropping to 14.6% in 2025 for the nine-month (January to September) comparative period, a significant decrease from 23.6% in 2024. This 9% reduction is concurrent with more frequent use of Early Help Assessments and an increase in stepping cases across for support from preventative, community, and voluntary services.
- The percentage of assessments completed within 45 working days has continued to improve since 2022/23 and was at 91% in 2024/25 and is at 93% for April to September 2025. This is higher than statistical neighbours (86%) and the national average (84%).
- CFS has undertaken significant operational restructuring and service alignment in the 2024/25 reporting year, resulting in marked improvements in operational resilience and quality. Agency staff reduced from 33% in January 2025 to 8% in September 2025 (1 staff member).

- There have been improvements in sharing assessments ahead of an Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC) (only 1 rescheduled since Jan 2025). Schools have agreed to provide reports during school holidays, resulting in zero ICPCs going out of timeframes for the whole of August (compared to 18% last year).
- Social worker caseloads have steadily decreased from an average of 20 (January 2024) to an average 15 (October 2025) children per social worker.
- Workshops around cultural genograms, ecomaps, and 'tree of life' have been run to strengthen practice in exploring family cultures, histories, and support networks during assessments.
- A new family feedback audit process was introduced in April 2025, and its success is being adapted across CFS.
- A new audit process was also started in April 2025 to ensure the voice of the child is clear and embedded in all assessments. 22 dip samples were undertaken and graded between April and June 2025. 86% (19 children) of the total audited were graded either good or outstanding. Positive feedback included *'the social worker demonstrated significant effort in directly engaging with the children and documenting their diverse perspectives, ensuring their subjective realities are central to the record. Where direct verbal communication was limited observations and caregiver reports were effectively utilised.'* A further 7 children's files between July and September. Again 86% (6 children) were graded good or outstanding. For these 6 children the audit identified *"age appropriate, purposeful direct work"* and that children's views, wishes, and feelings were captured through *"meaningful conversations and play that was appropriate for the child's age and understanding"*. For children who were not able to verbalise their views, there was evidence that their views had been explored through observations, and feedback from the professional network.
- For Homeless 16/17 year olds, regular meetings are now held with the Placements Team and Housing to ensure accurate data is shared across the services and changes are being made to the MOSAIC workflows to reduce reliance on spreadsheets and improve reporting capabilities.

Next Steps

- Launch a new dedicated team of Newly Qualified Social Workers undertaking their Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE's). This will be a two-year pilot.
- Improve the timeliness of support and decisions for unborn babies by ensuring a partnership meeting is held within 10-15 working days of allocation where concerns are identified for the unborn baby.
- Implement a new Safety Plan template for risks identified within the home (e.g., poor parental mental health, domestic abuse) into Mosaic, followed by training and audits.

Assessments resulting in No Further Action (NFA) - Action Plan

We are aware that we have historically had a high number of Child and Family Assessments that result in No Further Action. We remain determined to improve our performance data and our approach to understand and address this issue. A small working group was formed to improve our understanding of re-referral rates, identify and understand current patterns and review our use of strategy discussions; initial findings were reported in December 2024. We subsequently took a whole system approach with an increase in referrals being sent from the MASH to Early Help, where it is safe to do so, as opposed to being put through for assessment. Service Managers have been regularly reviewing threshold decisions and reviewing the work (intervention) completed during assessments. As a result we have seen a decrease in the number of Child and Family Assessments resulting in No Further Social Work Action (58% April - September 2025, down from 72% in 2024/25). It is difficult to compare our progress with other Local Authorities as this is not publicly reported data. We have also been working with other local authorities to explore processes and procedures and recently met with Greenwich to see what we can learn and adapt. We continue to monitor assessments resulting in No Further Action.

Emergency Duty Team

The Emergency Duty Team (EDT) remains an accessible service managing a substantial volume of out-of-hours contacts. Partners appreciate the ability to quickly speak with a social worker and receive prompt, reliable responses. Service delivery and resilience have significantly improved since the introduction of designated EDT social workers (July 2024). The EDT MOSAIC workflow (developed November 2024) has improved data collection capabilities. Since January 2025 EDT workers have created 761 worksteps for children where the child has an allocated worker and 402 Contact and Referrals (new contacts).

Local Authority Designated Officer

The Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) service has the responsibility to manage and have oversight of all allegations made against people who work with children. The LADO service received 463 contacts in 2024/25, which is an increase of 52 (12%) on the previous year (411 contacts). This confirms the continued trajectory of year-on-year increases in LADO contacts, excluding the COVID-19 lockdown period.

Referrals remained remarkably consistent with previous years in terms of who and where the allegations were made against. Teachers (25% in 2024/25 up from 22% in 2023/24) and School Support Staff (24% in 2024/25 up from 23% in 2023/24) remain the highest referral groups. The settings with the highest volume of contacts continue to be Primary Schools (29% in 2024/25 up from 27% in 2023/24) and Secondary Schools (14% in 2024/25 up from 11% in 2023/24).

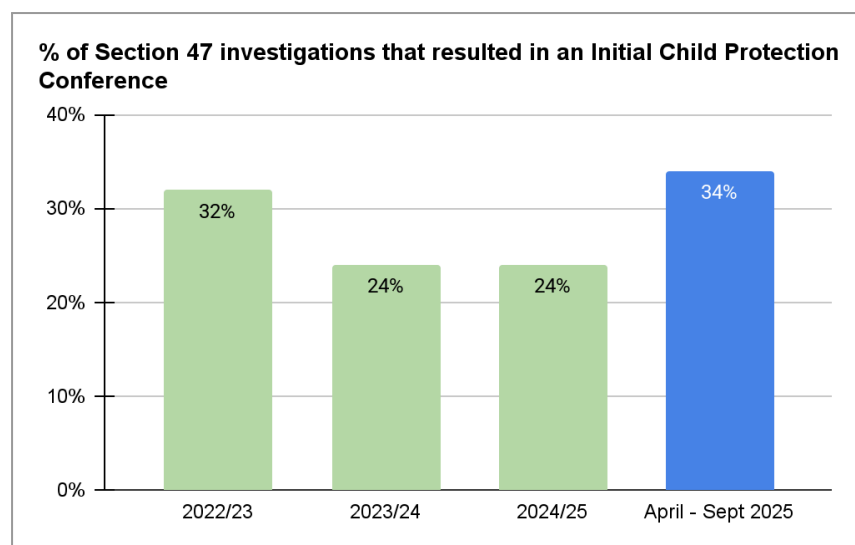
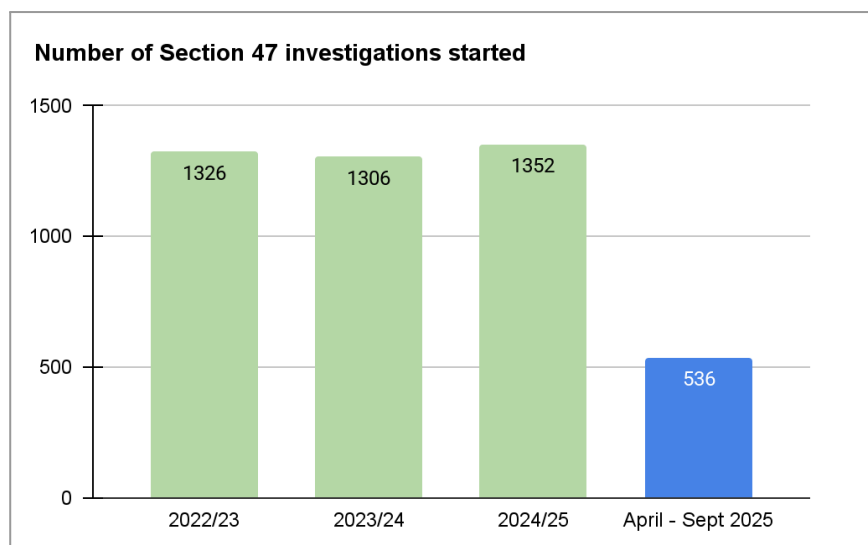
A dip sample audit of the LADO service undertaken in Spring 2025 rated decision-making to be 75% good and 25% outstanding.



Making good decisions and providing effective help

Strategy Discussions

1,352 Section 47 investigations began last year, a 3.5% increase from 2023/24 (1,306 Section 47 investigations started). This represents a rate of 249 Section 47 investigations per 10,000, which is above the average for statistical neighbours (228) and England (187). 536 Section 47 investigations were started between April to September 2025.



Practice is being reviewed around the use of single agency Section 47s and 'slowing down' the system to review timeliness of and thresholds for Strategy Discussions. The proportion of Section 47 investigations that progress to an Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC) has seen a notable operational change. The percentage of Section 47 investigations that progressed to ICPC was 24% for 2024/25 however from April to October 2025 - this has increased to 36%; this is higher than the national average (32%) and higher than our statistical neighbours (29%). This increase in progression to ICPC suggests a more effective filtering of cases at the referral stage and a reduction in unnecessary Section 47 enquiries.

This improved filtering is a direct result of the service's strategic focus on the over-representation of Black and Global Majority parents in the Section 47 cohort, where concerns are often quickly dissipated. Operationally, the service is working with Police colleagues to ensure a consistent threshold application. The goal is to ensure that a Section 17 (Child in Need) assessment is used as an appropriate and supportive intervention instead of immediately initiating a Section 47 enquiry when a child is not at immediate risk of significant harm. This strategic work is being driven by the City & Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership (CHSCP) to ensure clear evidence, partnership support, and accountability.

Detailed data analysis of all Physical Abuse contacts between the 1st of September 2024 and the 30th of November 2024.

We explored the potential disproportionality in decision-making once children become known to the MASH and Assessment and Planning Service for Physical Abuse. Hackney MASH received an overall total of 3934 contacts for children. 359 of these children were categorised as a referral for Physical Abuse.

Based on the provisional data collected, we found that 47% of the referrals were for Black/Black British children and young people and once you added in wider Global Majority children this accounted for 81% of the total, compared to the general population of 62% for this group. African ethnicities formed the majority category at nearly 30%.

From MASH screening, 62% of the total children progressed to assessment, just over half of whom were Black and Global Majority. A total of 23% (84 children) were assessed with the outcome of No Further Action. Of these, 41% (34 of 84) were Black children, compared to 23% (19 of 84) White children.

251 children progressed to the Assessment and Planning Service for the category of Physical Abuse, 46 of these children were White and 205 of them were Black and Global Majority. The decision not to progress to a Strategy Discussion was made for 80 Black and Global Majority children and 15 white children (67% vs 32%), this showed some re-balance at this point of decision making. 125 Black and Global Majority children were made subject to a Strategy Discussion compared to 31 white children. In percentage terms this began to balance out with 67% for white children and 60% for Black and Global Majority children. This indicates less disproportionate decision making at this stage, although numbers are still high.

During strategy discussion 63% of Black and Global Majority children progressed to joint Section 47 and 33% progressed to Single Agency; this was not that dissimilar for white children at 58% joint Section 47 and 42% progressed to Single Agency. Following this, 13 children were then referred to ICPC - 12 of whom were Black and Global Majority.

In summary, there is significant disproportionality in equality that seems to originate at the point of contact and requires further exploration for a comprehensive understanding. This needs to be done collaboratively with partner agencies. The review shows that a significant number of Black and Global Majority children are put through to the Assessment and Planning Service. Once in the service, percentage wise, this begins to balance out both in terms of decision to start a Section 47 and then outcome of the Strategy Discussion in terms of single or joint agency s47s. However, when we look at those children that then progress to Child Protection this disproportionately becomes even more significant again.

Ongoing work is being done with partners to look at these issues at the front door and in terms of decision making in [strategy](#) decisions. The 13 children who were placed on Child Protection Plans during this period will also be tracked in terms of learning. This work now forms part of the Anti-Racist Practice Action Plan and we continue to monitor progress through data and audits.

Children supported on Child in Need Plans

The Child Protection Service is currently working with 346 children supported on Child in Need Plans (September 2025). This is a reduction from the end of March 2025 when 414 children were supported on Child in Need Plans. This reduction is linked to several factors including the Assessment and Planning service holding 24 families under short term (up to 3 months) Child in Need Plans to reduce transitions for families and the diversion pilot in Early Help services and importantly, proactive oversight by managers to ensure that children's plans reflect their level of need and that children are provided with the right level of support.

Strengths

- We have embedded our expected Practice Standard for Children in Need visits to take place a minimum of every 20 working days to ensure social work activity is purposeful and meaningful for children and to ensure plans progress.
- There is senior management oversight of Child in Need Plans at agreed points (6, 9 and 15 months) and this has reduced drift and contributed to an overall lower number of children supported on Child in Need Plans.
- Children who are not seen within required timescales are reviewed by Service Managers and the Head of Service at monthly 'Frustrated Access' meetings where onward plans are discussed and agreed.

Next Steps

- During the Ofsted inspection (July 2024), inspectors highlighted that for a small number of children, progress had slowed when they have stepped down from Child Protection processes to Child in Need arrangements, and some plans for Children in Need did not represent the

fullness of the multi-agency involvement. Continued work, including audits, has been completed to ensure that partner agencies are aware of the rationale for the 'step down' and continued planning with the family.

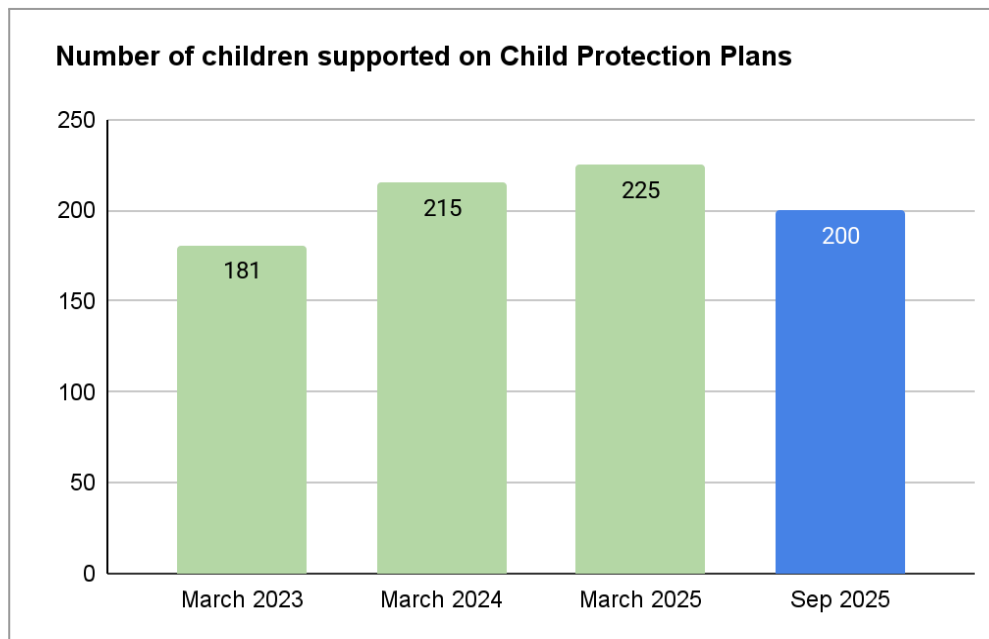
- Embedding of robust recording and sharing with partners of 'step down' arrangements so that progress can be more clearly overseen by managers. A Dip Sample was completed on case closures in February 2025 which noted that the reasons for step down to universal services was clear and clearly communicated to children, parents, carers and key agencies for 78% of children.
- Supporting alternatively qualified practitioners to lead on support for children on Child in Need Plans, including identifying and understanding escalating risk as part of the Families First Partnership planning.
- Ensuring that effective oversight and check points which reduce risk and increase safety, are continued during the changes in becoming a Family Help Service as part of the Families First Partnership Reforms.

Family Group Conferences

From April 2024 to April 2025 there were 102 referrals into the externally commissioned Family Group Conference service. 61 Family Group Conferences were completed; 29 conferences did not take place (the majority of these were due to the family not consenting to the conference going ahead), and 12 referrals are still in progress. A dip sample undertaken in the summer of 2025 demonstrated the positive impact that Family Group Conferences can have for families: the dip sample looked at five families who had participated in a Family Group Conference and concluded that the plan drawn up at the Family Group Conference had reduced risk to the child/ren in four families and partially achieved this in one.

In line with the Families First Partnership Reforms, we are carefully considering our family meetings offer and how to engage more families in a supportive way. We are looking at different options for family decision making and the possibility of changing providers to ensure a more proactive approach is taken.

Children supported on Child Protection Plans



In 2024/25 there was a continued upward trend in the number of children requiring support through Child Protection Plans (CPP). Following a 19% increase from March 2023 to March 2024, the total number of children supported on a CPP has grown to 225 in March 2025 (an increase of 5%).

The rate of children on a CPP in September 2025 was 36 per 10,000, which is below our statistical neighbours (44 per 10,000 children) and the national average of 42 per 10,000.

20 children (10%) are currently supported by a Child Protection Plan where extra familial harm is the overriding concern within the family. 33 children (14%) are supported by a Child Protection plan where child sexual abuse is the primary concern. There is an increase in the number of Section 47 investigations (34% April to September 2025) that lead to Initial Child Protection Conferences which suggests improved consideration of the threshold of significant harm.

Crucially, the service has made significant progress in ensuring statutory compliance for reviews. The percentage of Child Protection Plans reviewed in the required timescales increased to 83% in the April–September 2025 period and it has been higher month on month this year. While the service maintains a trauma-informed approach that may lead to a review being held outside of the statutory timescale when agreed by the Head of Service and deemed in the child's best interest, the operational focus has demonstrably improved overall timeliness.

Duration of closed Child Protection Plans (percentage)

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	April - Sept 2025
Under 3 months	19%	17%	25%	13%	16%
3 - 6 months	12%	9%	11%	17%	15%
6 - 12 months	38%	42%	46%	44%	36%
1 - 2 years	30%	29%	18%	24%	31%
2+ years	1%	4%	1%	3%	2%

Between January 2025 and September 2025, the percentage of children supported by a Child Protection Plan for a second or subsequent time has varied, from between 30% to 6% but averaging at 12% which is lower than statistical neighbours (23%) and national average (25%).

Feedback provided during 2024/25 shows that 82% of parents and carers understood the reason we were providing support. 73% said we kept them properly informed about important information and that it was easy to contact their social worker. Positive comments from parents included “I feel I have been heard...listened to” Other feedback noted that parents and carers felt they received support that was non-judgemental and that they received support at a time when they were at “breaking point” and that the support helped them. The service has introduced additional ways to try to engage families with the aim of increasing the amount of feedback to further understand the experience of families we support. This has included, for example, the addition of a feedback QR code on assessments shared with families.

A supervision dip sample in the Child Protection Service in May 2025 identified that timeliness of supervision recording needed to improve. To strengthen oversight of this area, the service has introduced a traffic light monitoring system which highlights outstanding supervisions and the type of plan for these children, meaning that leaders can follow up with managers and prioritise oversight for those children at highest risk of harm. Supervision recording has since improved.

Child Protection Plans - visits

As of September 2025, 76% of children supported through Child Protection Plans had visits undertaken within 10 working days. Recording of visits is being monitored to ensure all children are seen in a timely way in accordance with their plans. When reviewed (on a rolling weekly basis), the majority of these visits have taken place but were not yet recorded. There is urgent escalation to the Head of Service if visits or recording are not happening, with identification of alternative practitioners where there are gaps in staffing. A monthly performance monitoring meeting is in place to review if there

are regular or persistent issues with recording. There are also a number of families (currently 24 families) supported through Child Protection and Child in Need plans where there are difficulties in gaining entry to the family home within statutory timeframes. Actions to address these delays are monitored by the Head of Service at monthly 'Frustrated Access' meetings where plans and decision making is reviewed.

Strengths

- Child Protection Plans are reviewed by the Head of Service at 13 months+ to ensure that plans are timely, relevant and do not drift. Child Protection Plans that end at 3 months are reviewed by the Head of Service for Child Protection, and Service Managers in the Assessment and Planning Service, to consider whether the threshold and decision making, leading to the Initial Child Protect Conference, was correct.
- During their inspection, Ofsted found that *'the child protection reviewing process is broadly effective. Child protection chairs successfully maintain the focus of intervention on the needs of the child, ensuring that plans lead to actions and outcomes that are measurable and timely for the child. Effective multi-agency engagement in both child protection and child in need processes results in most children making positive progress, with risks and harm reducing.'*
- A dip sample audit undertaken in quarter 1 of 2024/25 demonstrated that all audited files had an up to date Child Protection Plan on file.

Next Steps

- Timeliness of Initial Child Protect Conferences where the change of date is as a result of workforce issues in the Child Protection Service, rather than to support family attendance.
- We are aware that the timeliness of conference report writing is not where we wish it to be - this is a continued area of development.
- New training on embedding safety plans for all children has started and the expectation is that every child should have a plan clearly recorded on their mosaic record.
- Working towards upskilling practitioners from service areas to identify and work with risk in the new Family Help teams as part of the Families First Partnership Reforms.

Pre-proceedings and Care proceedings

On 31st March 2025, there were 17 children in Pre-Proceedings compared to 29 children in Pre-Proceedings at the end of March 2024. There were 25 children in Pre-Proceedings at the end of September 2025. The average duration of Pre-Proceedings is 20 weeks which is above the Court's Practice Standard of 16 weeks. However, the timescales (being over 16 weeks) are not unexpected due to usual assessment timeframes (minimum

12 weeks) and are still lower than our Central Family Court neighbours. All outliers have robust Head of Service oversight and are primarily due to pre and post birth assessments, where court work can take longer and all assessments need to be completed before issuing.

On 31st March 2025, there were a total of 84 children in Care Proceedings with 79 children in Care Proceedings at the end of September 2025. In 2024/25 we issued Care Proceedings for 58 children (a total of 42 care applications). For April - September 2025, we issued Care Proceedings for 40 children (a total of 25 care applications).

The time taken to complete Care Proceedings was an average of 50 weeks in Hackney in 2024/25, although if outliers are not included (mainly cases which have overseas elements) then our average is 34 weeks. The challenges around timely completion of Care Proceedings is due to significant difficulties in scheduling final hearings, the involvement of international parties and delays in experts filing their assessments.

For 2024/25, 24 sets of Care Proceedings, relating to 31 children concluded with a Special Guardianship Order. Year to date from April 2025, 4 sets of Care Proceedings, relating to 5 children have concluded with Special Guardianship Orders. We note that the Judiciary carefully considers the 'nothing else will do' principle.

In Spring 2024, Hackney began work as part of the Designated Family Judge (DFJ) Trailblazers Pilot, which aims to reduce delay in the family justice system.

The Department for Education appointed a delivery partner to work with local authorities to design and implement solutions aimed at reducing family court delays, creating efficiencies in the family justice system and enabling quicker decisions to reduce the negative long-term effects on the children and families involved. The pilot undertook an analysis of local need and co-produced a solution with local partners to pilot until March 2025. Whilst the pilot concluded, a legacy alliance has formed between some of the local authorities, with a commitment to share information, data and strengthen responses to the Judiciary.

Strengths

- We continue to have a positive relationship with Cafcass and the Judiciary - feedback remains positive and thresholds are appropriate. We meet regularly and challenge each other effectively resulting in more robust care planning.
- Systems to ensure senior management oversight at key points for children supported on Child in Need and Child Protection Plans is in place to help make sure the right decisions are being made for children, at the right time.

- Supervision Orders are monitored robustly and visits are expected every 10 days for the first three months. Reviews are held by the Service Manager at 3 months and again at 9 months to consider the exit plan; if an extension is required a Legal Planning Meeting will be held at this point.
- All children who are subject to Pre-Proceedings or Care Proceedings have Permanency Planning Meetings, chaired by the Head of Service, to ensure that children have the right planning and that all parallel plan options are explored.

Next Steps

- On 30th September 2025 Mr Justice McDonald, Family Presiding Judge for London, issued a Revised Public Law Practice Note for London stressing the importance of making each Court Hearing count, avoiding the use of unnecessary experts and using an alternative Court in London for cases to be heard. All this is in an attempt to reduce the duration of Care Proceedings. Hackney will adhere to these expectations and encourage those others within the Court system to do the same.
- Advocating that if Care proceedings are issued the assessments completed within the Pre-Proceedings process are accepted and do not need to be repeated.
- Embedding of the London Practice Note through partnership working with the Courts to bring the duration of Pre-Proceedings back to the 26 week expectation.
- Insistence on the embedding of the agreed outcomes of the Trailblazers pilot, which is for children's guardians and social workers to hold a pre meeting to discuss Final Care Plans before the Final Evidence is submitted, prior to the Issues and Resolutions Hearing (IRH).

Clinical Support

Partnership Mental Health Support - the CAMHS Alliance

The [CAMHS Alliance](#), formed in April 2015, facilitates partnership working between different organisations and services, and ensures we deliver integrated pathways that can effectively reach more children, young people, families, schools and the wider community. The Alliance includes a number of key partnership services covering early years and early help to specialist mental health services.

In-house Clinical Service

The Clinical Service currently offers clinical consultations to all colleagues working with children and families within CFS. All families are also able to access family therapy clinics (FTCs). Children and young people who are Looked After by the local authority and those who are Care Leavers (up to 25 years) are additionally able to access individual and/or dyadic support. This can take the form of assessment or a range of interventions. In 2024/25, the CFS Clinical Service received a total of 719 referrals, undertook 527 consultations with practitioners and 154 Talk Together

Appointments (TTAs). 243 children were allocated for direct intervention across the year, 14 of these were open to the Edge of Care Service. 13 children and young people were supported through a pilot autism pathway, which was led by Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) trainees.

There has been significant change within the Clinical Service and a review of remit and responsibilities is underway which will refresh the support available from the service.

Children's Rights Service

Hackney's Children's Rights Service provides a range of support to children and young people who are, or have been, supported by Hackney Children's Social Care, with priority given to children who are Looked After, Care Leavers or supported on Child Protection Plans. The team provides an independent service that helps young peoples' voices be heard through advocacy, represents children's wishes and feelings, and provides information to children and young people about their rights and entitlements. A dip sample audit of the Children's Rights Service undertaken in Summer 2025 noted practice to be very strong, with 80% of auditors rating practice as good or outstanding.

During the Ofsted ILACS in July 2024 it was identified that *'return interviews are not offered or completed consistently enough when children go missing from home and care'*. The strategic decision was therefore made that CRO's would lead on contacting all children when they return from missing to make a direct offer of an independent return home interview. CRO's now undertake all return interviews and recording of these interviews unless a child expresses a clear preference to have a conversation with their allocated social worker or another trusted adult. In 2024/25 for children who were missing from home or care, 76% were offered a Return Home Interview, with 69% of these being offered within 72 hours. 35% of interviews were accepted which is a statistically significant improvement from 2023/24 (24% of Return Home Interviews accepted) and the service will be continuing to work with children and young people in the year ahead to explore how we might further increase take up of the offer.

In 2024/25, 377 children (421 referrals) were offered support by the Children's Rights Service, which is an increase from the previous year (314 children and 387 referrals in 2023/24). 220 (52%) of the referrals (for 200 YP) accepted the offer of support. For children who declined the support of the CRO service, the vast majority (58%) were offered advocacy in relation to the Child Protection support, so it is highly likely that parents declined this support, or they were offered an Independent Return Home Interview from the Children's Rights Service.



Identifying and responding to all types of abuse, recognising the vulnerability of specific groups of children

Safeguarding children during adolescence

The [CHSCP Extra Familial Harm Strategy 2024-26](#) was agreed in March 2024. The strategy's primary purpose is to make children safer and to define the pathways to tackle extra-familial harm in all its forms. It seeks to ensure that multi-agency practice is focused on the reduction of risk and the range of associated vulnerabilities that can exacerbate this.

In Hackney we convene Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC) where the risk of significant harm is identified as being solely extra-familial. In 2025, we undertook an audit review of the impact of this initiative, where 25 dip samples were completed, sampling the files of every child who had been supported by an Extra Familial Risk Child Protection Plan since this type of plan began in 2023. Strengths included good engagement with children and their families, good multi-agency planning, good co-creation of safety planning with children, social workers working with parents as partners in safeguarding, and good support for school attendance, including the use of the Re-Engagement Unit.

In March 2023 we moved to an embedded model of Contextual Safeguarding, with social work units taking responsibility for safeguarding of children at risk of or experiencing extra-familial harm. Young Hackney offers peer group interventions where appropriate and Hackney Education supports schools to embed [Keeping children safe in Education](#). Our Community Gangs Team lead on place based interventions where there are concerns about serious violence and gang activity.

Our Contextual Safeguarding Practice Lead chairs the Extra-Familial Risk Panel, offers consultation across the partnership, and oversees missing children from home and from care. The Extra-Familial Risk Panel co-ordinates multi-agency oversight and interventions for children.

Neglect

Feedback received from Ofsted during our ILACS inspection in 2019 was that a small number of children on Child Protection Plans were experiencing neglectful circumstances for too long. As a result we introduced clear points of management oversight for children who are supported on Child in Need and Child Protection plans as well as oversight for any pre-proceedings that exceed 16 weeks in duration. These check in points remain in place.

In July 2024, the Ofsted ILACS found that *'the impact of neglect for children is understood and is differentiated from poverty.'* We have continued to strengthen our practice in relation to neglect and published our [updated practice guidance](#) on working with neglect in October 2024 including a new expectation which ensures that where we are working with children experiencing neglect, joint visits with a senior social worker or team manager occur at least 3 monthly to monitor change.

Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)

We have 10 CSA Practice Leads across CFS who have been trained by the [CSA Centre of Expertise](#) to support practitioners working with children who have been sexually abused, or where there is suspected abuse. Consultations are offered as early as possible to discuss tools and ways of working to identify and assess sexual abuse, and to consider referral pathways. A fortnightly panel is in place to support practitioners working with CSA and to review children's plans. Established links with local partners and agencies including the Sunrise Hub have been embedded and practice including robust intervention within legal proceedings has improved. The CSA Practice Leads meet 6 weekly to discuss any emerging themes, issues or blockages and are rolling out 'myth busting' training from November 2025. We are exploring further training to increase our numbers of CSA Practice Leads within the service.

Disabled Children's Service (DCS)

Our Disabled Children's Service remains a stable and established service. Since January 2025 we have reduced agency staffing from 17% to zero in September 2025. Caseloads in DCS currently remain manageable with an average caseload of 18.2 children per practitioner. Over the last quarter DCS completed on average 89% of assessments within 45 days, this is a decrease in usual performance in this area which is generally above 90%.

Care Packages are being consistently reviewed annually to ensure that children are receiving the right support to meet their needs. Work has begun to incorporate the Mosaic Care Package Review workstep with the Child and Family Assessment workstep.

Work is currently in progress to develop a DCS and Short Breaks website. Consultations with children and families regarding the creation of the website will begin in early 2026. It is envisaged that this website will act as a tool to increase communication and collaboration with children and families as well as providing important information for the families we work with.

Work has been undertaken to ensure that social workers understand and incorporate children's Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) in Care Package Assessments. The aim is for our care packages to be more focused on how they support children's goals and developmental needs. A half day workshop on the Social Model of Disability took place within the service (June 2025), generating positive discussion. This training also focused on how EHCP's are incorporated in our work and the importance of a child's voice in decision making.

A Learning Conversation audit focussed on transitions for children was undertaken in 2025. The Children with Disabilities Service was rated highly in relation to timely referrals made for disabled children who need ongoing support from adult social care services. Specific examples included a child who was referred to the adult social care team at 16 ensuring preparations began well in advance of the transition point. The transition for another child was planned carefully resulting in no disruption to the care package they received when they moved to adult social care. The service continues to work closely with adult social care services to ensure that children receive a seamless transition.

Scoping work has begun on the long term project to develop a Disabled Children's Hub providing overnight respite and longer term residential care for disabled children in Hackney. The Disabled Children's Hub will address a critical gap in Hackney's overnight break and residential provision for disabled children with Autism and complex behaviours. Current insufficient local provision results in reactive and high-cost out-of-borough placements, which are both disruptive to family life and financially unsustainable for the Council.

Next Steps

- The use of communication passports has not yet been rolled out in DCS. Currently as part of the Learning Disability/ Neurodiversity crisis working group a universal passport is being developed across partner agencies which will incorporate communication/ hospital passports into one.
- Procurement is currently in progress for Homecare and Shortbreaks commissioned services and Overnight care commissioned services. We want to ensure that services commissioned through Hackney council provide high quality, safe care to our disabled children which supports their independence, rights and aspirations. We know that there are gaps in good quality overnight respite and as such have sought to procure these services separately, with an aim to increase commissioned provision in this area. We have worked with the commissioning team to ensure that a robust tendering process is in place with detailed quality questions that speak to the needs of our cohort of children. Jointly working with the new integrated commissioning team and utilising new procurement legislation to implement an open framework will support our monitoring of the quality of care delivered to our disabled children.
- Relationships between Adults services and the Disabled Children Service are strong at a management/ leadership level. We want to further develop relationships and opportunities to share learning between practitioners through joint workshops and forums. For example, Adults Services will be working with DCS to support increased learning in respect of Carers Assessments through a workshop delivered by Adults Service colleagues.

Private Fostering

A child under the age of 16 (under 18, if disabled) who is cared for, or proposed to be cared for, and provided with accommodation by someone other than a parent, person with parental responsibility or close relative for 28 days or more is described as being privately fostered. Local authorities do not approve private foster carers, but are required to assess a private fostering arrangement to ensure that the welfare of privately fostered children is promoted and that the children are safeguarded. At the end of September 2025, 5 private fostering arrangements were open to Hackney.

Between December 2024 and February 2025, audits were completed for all 9 of the privately fostered children who were open to the service at the time. Findings include:

- Visits were mostly being held in timescale and there was good recording of children's wishes and feelings;
- Assessment work was thorough and robust;
- Assessments and reviews of private fostering arrangements were noted to be of good quality;
- Good engagement with fathers was noted.
- For 1 relevant child who did not have the right to remain in the UK post-18, the allocated social worker ensured that the child/carers/parents received independent legal advice and the child was granted leave to remain.
- Overall practice was deemed to largely meet practice standards. However the audit demonstrated that Private fostering reviews were completed and presented to the Stability Panel within annual timescales for 67% of children, and this was therefore identified as an area for improvement which is now being addressed.

Children missing education

Elective Home Education (EHE) and Children Missing Education (CME) services have supported 74 children back into school since the start of the academic year (to date, 13/10/25). Around 95% of CME cases are successfully tracked within 6 weeks, and our standard CME cohort sits between 50 and 70, and is broadly in line with statistical neighbours. Our CME and EHE work was praised during the Ofsted ILACS in July 2024, for our robust challenge around risk and for our oversight and management of the cohorts.

Hackney Education works jointly with CHSCP to enact our shared available powers to safeguard children in Yeshivot (which we understand to make up all of the unregistered education settings operating in Hackney). Initial discussions are underway with the Yeshiva Liaison Committee around strengthening transparency of adequate safeguarding protocols being followed in all Yeshivot, led by CHSCP and Hackney Education.

Strengths

- We have delivered attendance training to a variety of colleagues including from our library staff to maintenance teams in our Housing Service. Hackney have been flagged by the DfE as delivering well in this area, and are due to work on an attendance project to support in identifying best practice for children experiencing severe barriers to education and missing 50% or more of their sessions at school. We are really encouraged by this recognition and looking forward to being part of this project.
- Hackney Education's Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) support team; the Re-engagement Unit (REU), partnered with New Regent's College and four secondary schools between April and November 2025, to run a Year 9 pilot to deliver targeted (free) intervention to Year 9 children. This was highly successful and five of the six children referred have resettled in mainstream schools ready for KS4. Our 2024/25 summer term Year 9 exclusions (the year group with the highest exclusions historically) were down by 50% from 2023/24.
- In 2024/25 the REU has worked with 320 children across 46 different primary schools and 16 different secondary schools. 56 children received a targeted Year 6 transition programme to add additional support to settle comfortably into secondary school.

Next Steps

- There remain significant disproportionalities in suspension rates for some cohorts in Hackney, and these largely mirror the national trends, as well as some significant school by school variations.



Edge of Care

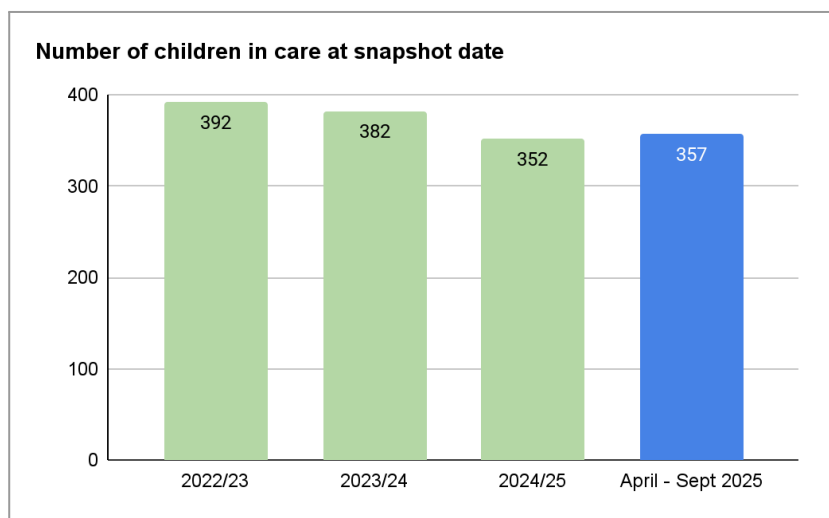
In Hackney we work really hard to keep children at home in their families, wherever possible, and have seen a steady decline in children and young people coming into care. When children come into care it can negatively impact many aspects of their lives including education, health and wellbeing. Worryingly, our experience indicates that many children who came into our care late in their childhoods presented as no safer or more settled in care than they had when living with their family. We also know that a significant proportion of young people will choose to return home after a period of being in care as they get older. This could indicate that with the right level of support at the right time the care episode could have been prevented, reducing the trauma to the family and cost to the local authority.

Our Edge of Care service transitioned from under the In-House Clinical Service to the Assessment and Planning Service in November 2024. We have worked hard to re-balance the work with longer term clinical support and the need for immediate support when families are at a crisis point. This has been based on the need to reduce the number of 15+ year olds entering the care system. The longer term work provides highly coordinated support, often involving frequent, sometimes daily, contact and work delivered in the family's home, including outside of traditional 9-to-5 working hours. The duration is short to medium term, interventions are typically time-limited, often lasting an average of 3 to 9 months. The service provides a clear goal-setting plan with the family and a view toward "stepping down" to less intensive community services afterward.

Section 3: The experiences and progress of children in care



Children in Care



The number of Children Looked After (CLA) continued to decline over the past year, as part of a longer-term trajectory from a peak of 470 in November 2020. Since March 2025 these numbers have plateaued and stand at 357 as of September 2025. These figures are now in line with statistical neighbours and below national averages. Our ongoing focus continues to be on ensuring that the right children come into our care at the right time.

Most of our children in care are aged 10 and above, with 38% aged 10 to 15 and 33% aged 16 and over. This is in line with the national average (38% for 10-15) and our statistical neighbours (34% for 10-15). For children aged 16 and over we are slightly above the national average (27% for 2024), but below our statistical neighbours at 36% (for 2024).

The majority of our children looked after (77%) are from Black and Global Majority Communities. The highest proportion of children are from Black African, Caribbean or British communities (40%), although this proportion has fallen slightly over the past 10 years. We believe that this is due to the structural racism that children and their families will have experienced, often over generations, both within child protection systems - including our own - and wider society.

Strengths

- Our looked after children are seen regularly and many benefit from stable, long-term relationships with their social workers. We have updated our Practice Standards to ensure any looked after children in care proceedings are seen at a minimum of every 4 weeks.
- We are proud of the educational achievements of our children in care. Whilst around a third of them have Education and Health Care Plans, our strong Virtual School team works with children, their carers and their networks from early years all the way through to post-16 education

and training opportunities. The Virtual School team includes teachers, social pedagogues, learning mentors, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists and educational psychologists.

- The timeliness of health assessments improved in 2024/25 with 97% of looked after children having a health check within the expected timeframe (this was 92% in 2023/24).
- We promote permanency for our children wherever possible: a smaller proportion of our children are subject to Section 20 (voluntary care) arrangements than statistical neighbours or nationally.
- We are committed to exploring opportunities to revisit rehabilitation to family wherever possible. As at September 2025, 11 of our children who are subject to care orders were living with their parents, with strong systems of support and monitoring in place, in the hope that we can support this to become their long-term care plan.
- Between April 2024-June 2025, 13 scored audits were completed for children looked after, with 67% (8) scoring Good overall.

Next Steps

We have recently finalised our Corporate Parenting Strategy for 2026-28, which set out our priorities for improvement over the next 3 years. Key areas include:

- We are pleased with the roll out so far of a new cloud-based platform - the Virtual Memory Box - to store key memories and documents and support life story work for our children and young people. There is further work to do to embed this approach and best practice in life story work more generally.
- Increasing the educational engagement of all looked after children whose attendance falls below 95%, with a particular focus on those with chronic poor attendance. Last year 20 pupils were severe absentees, all with complicated set of circumstances. Attendance was monitored weekly and plans put in place to support them to attend where possible.
- Ensuring all looked after children who have been excluded from mainstream schools receive the support they need to either return to their education setting or access appropriate alternatives in a timely way. While there have been no permanent exclusions for children in care for the last 10 years, suspensions do occasionally take place. 23 students received at least one exclusion last year, and all were supported to remain in their current school.
- Only 63% of our children in 2024/25 had complete immunisation records. We are working with the Looked After Health team to identify and address these and other health priorities for our cohort of children, for example, healthy eating and weight management.
- In September 2025 the Corporate Parenting Board endorsed a decision to sign up to a pledge with South London Refugee Association to work with them and other local authorities on promoting best practice around resolving any immigration needs for our care experienced children and young people.
- Improving the quality of safety planning with and for care experienced children and young people.

- In line with what our children have told us in a consultation on family time, promoting family time that is more regular, and less professionally supervised, wherever possible and appropriate.
- Continuing to challenge ourselves to deliver on our anti-racist corporate parenting commitment.



Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children

On 31 March 2025 we were supporting 25 children who were unaccompanied asylum seekers. The proportion of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in the borough has fluctuated over the past 10 years. The figure reached a high of 11% (45 children) in the 2018/19 period, subsequently decreasing to 4% (15 children) by 2023/24 and rising again in 2024/25. In September 2025 we were supporting 33 children who were unaccompanied asylum seekers. This variation is primarily due to a change in referral patterns: in the past, approximately half of children in this cohort were in-borough presentations. Fewer children now present directly to the Council and the majority of current referrals are via the National Rota Scheme. Whilst the national percentage of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) has been steadily increasing since 2021, reaching 9% of all looked after children in 2022–23, the National Rota Scheme has become more effective at dispersing the referrals nationally.

Our unaccompanied looked after children and care leavers benefit from a specialist Social Work Team who support them from the point of referral until their immigration issues are resolved.



Homes For Our Children and Young People

All local authorities are required to take steps to secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for their care experienced children and young people. We are in the process of finalising our Sufficiency Strategy for 2026-28, which will set out how we intend to provide safe, nurturing and sustainable homes for all our looked after children and care leavers.

Strengths

- Whilst we recognise at times some children may need different care arrangements for particular periods in their lives, we believe that the best long-term homes for children and young people are in family settings, with foster carers, connected carers, supported lodgings hosts or

staying put arrangements. As of March 2025, 74% of our children in care were living in foster care arrangements. Of these, 57% were with in-house carers. Over time, we have approved increasing numbers of connected carers, a trend that is mirrored nationally. Currently 22% of our carers are approved friends and family carers. In April 2025 we launched our Kinship Strategy and [Kinship Local Offer](#), which outlines the support available to all our kinship carers, including special guardians, connected carers and private foster carers.

- As of March 2025, Hackney Fostering Service was supporting 138 fostering and supported lodging households, with 48% of carers living in Hackney. As with the national picture, it remains an ongoing challenge to recruit new mainstream carers. In April 2025 we uplifted our fostering fees and introduced new specialist rates, to ensure our remuneration to carers remained competitive.
- In 2024/25, 72% of our children who had been in care for at least 2.5 years had been in their current homes for more than 2 years. The proportion of children who experienced two or more moves in the year was 12%, down from 13% the year before.
- In 2024/25, 91% of our children lived either in Hackney or within 20 miles of the borough, up from 88% the year before and compared to figures for statistical neighbours in 2023/24 of 83%.
- In October 2025, two Council owned buildings were granted planning permission to operate as Children's Homes.
- Feedback from our foster carers is that they benefit hugely from peer support. We have three established Hackney Villages (formally known as Mockingbird constellations) and are exploring new opportunities to expand the Hackney Village model.
- We have a strong Hackney Foster Carers' Council who have led a great deal of work in the past year to help the wider system understand the role of foster carers and hear their voices.
- The 'Annual Foster Carer Survey Overview (September 2025)' highlighted that in-house carers feel well supported by the service. In response to the statement "I feel happy with the level of support and supervision I receive from the fostering service", 90% of carers indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed.

Next Steps

- We plan to award the tender for a partner provider to work with us on our children's home project in January 2026, with a view to opening the homes later in the year. We continue to explore other opportunities to develop new homes for our care experienced children and young people in borough, including the scoping of a Disabled Children's Hub, to offer short breaks and long-term care to disabled children, as well as looking at supported accommodation provision for 16 and 17 year olds.
- Unfortunately, as a result of significant sufficiency challenges, many Councils report that they are still having to use homes that have not yet been registered with Ofsted to care for some of their children. Often these care arrangements are made in emergencies, for children who have particularly complex needs. A National Audit Office Report published in September 2025 highlighted that the number in unregistered homes rose sharply nationally to 982 in 2023-24. Meanwhile, whilst local authority expenditure on residential care almost doubled between 2019/20

and 2023/24, from £1.6bn to £3.1b, whilst the average spend per child increased from £239,800 to £318,400 a year. This is in a context where 84% of children's homes are privately owned. As of October 2025, we had 3 children living in unregistered homes. We are actively working with these providers to support them to register with Ofsted, whilst also continuing to look for alternative care options in regulated homes. All of these children have experienced a disrupted care history and have significant additional and complex needs.

- We continue to be committed to regional and pan-London work to address national sufficiency challenges, for example, the London Accommodation Pathfinder Project, which offers an alternative to remand for children aged 16 and 17. We are working with our North London Fostering Consortium partners (Haringey, Islington, Camden, Enfield and Barnet) to progress a bid for DfE funding to develop a consortium recruitment and assessment hub: the DfE have indicated they are keen to support this endeavour.
- We have worked with external consultants IMPOWER to develop a business case focused on improving the recruitment, retention and utilisation of in-house carers.
- We have plans, within the clinical service review and enhance the clinical support available to our carers, in order to improve their capacity to deliver therapeutically informed care to our children and young people.
- We continue to try and improve the process of assessment and support to temporarily approved kinship carers, so they are well prepared for their journeys that lie ahead with the children in their care.



Adoption

In 2024/25, three children were adopted. Since March 2025, one child has been adopted. We currently have three children who have been matched and who either have transitioned or are in the process of transitioning into the care of their prospective adopters; we expect Adoption Orders to be granted for these children in the next quarter. We are in the process of rescinding Placement Orders for four children due to change in circumstances and care plans (this includes a sibling group of three). We have four children with Agency Decision Maker decisions where the Final Hearing has not yet taken place.

Next Steps

- The Service has a further 11 children subject to Care and Placement orders who we are actively Family Finding for. Of these 11 children, eight are of Black and Global Majority backgrounds. Further work is needed nationally and locally with Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) to recruit and support Black and Global Majority adopters.

- We are actively considering where best to sit Court work in our system, to minimise transitions for families, whilst balancing experience and expertise, in line with the Families First Partnership Reforms.



Helping and protecting looked after children

Independent Chairs and Looked After Child Reviews

Our Independent Chairs ensure a participatory approach to Looked After Reviews with a focus on direct work and activities to support a positive experience and engagement in reviews according to age and ability. All reviews are written to children rather than about them. 450 looked after children received a review in 2024/25, and 906 Looked After Reviews took place during that period. In 2024/25, 89% of reviews took place within timescale. Where reviews are not held in timescale the Service Manager will record the reason on the child's Mosaic record.

Strengths

- During 2024/25, approximately 90% of looked after children who were over the age of four and able to contribute, participated in their Looked After Reviews in some way whether directly (83%), through an advocate, or another method. 10% of children did not attend or contribute to their reviews (due to being missing or declining to contribute). Data continues to show that participation in reviews is good. 13% of children were under 4 years old at the time of their review, meaning no formal contribution was expected.
- The service also tracked parental participation with ongoing efforts to improve engagement. In 2024/25, 68% of mothers and 46% of fathers participated in Looked After Reviews. Practice Standards now require practitioners and Independent Chairs to ensure efforts are made to engage both parents as part of each review process. A further audit on parental engagement was completed in November 2025.

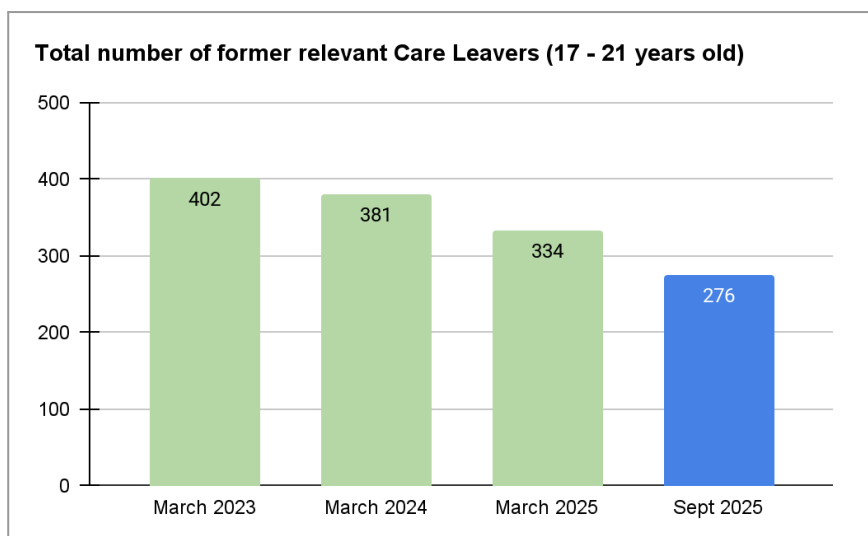
Next Steps

- To improve data timeliness and ensure Social Work Reports (Care Plans and Pathway Plans) are submitted promptly for Looked After Reviews.
- Advance Anti-Racist Practice by addressing issues of discrimination and unfair treatment based on a child's identity and conduct a specific audit of the Independent Chairs' anti-racist practice.
- Enhance child feedback through increasing the use of tools like the Mind of My Own app to obtain direct feedback from children and families.

- Align the service with the Family First Partnership Reforms, specifically by reviewing whether to split the Independent Reviewing Officer roles from the new Lead Child Protection Practitioner roles.

Section 4: The experiences and progress of care leavers

In July 2024 the Ofsted ILACS found that *‘the consistency of responses to care leavers’ and ‘the timely allocation of accommodation for care leavers needs to improve’* and this has informed our ongoing work to strengthen the services we offer our care leavers.



The total number of former relevant Care Leavers (aged 17–21) has gradually declined over time, falling from 402 at March 2023 to 334 at March 2025, and further to 276 by September 2025.

Strengths

- In April 2024 it was agreed that Hackney care leavers could join our Housing Register in the priority band from the age of 18 (previously this was not possible before 21). Work was undertaken to update the Housing Register by the end of September 2024 and by September 2025 **53 care leavers had successfully bid for a tenancy**. The total proportion of our care leavers living in their own social housing tenancies has increased from 19% in January 2025, to 28% in September 2025.

- A Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme (SHAP) funded Housing First Project, running from 2024-2027, is supporting 10 further care leavers with complex needs into permanent accommodation, whilst we continue to commission care leaver-specialist voluntary sector organisation, Settle, to offer post tenancy support to other care leavers. Since we started working with Settle in 2023, 55 of our care leavers have benefited from their support.

- Prior to turning 21, we encourage care leavers to remain living with former carers post 18, where they wish to, and have a well-established supported accommodation pathway. The Council has committed in its forthcoming Housing Strategy to focus on care leavers as a priority group. Work has begun with Housing Strategy colleagues to explore options for alternatives to mainstream temporary accommodation for our young people in the future. The changes in the housing register have already seen fewer care leavers having to live in temporary accommodation, with numbers down from 106 in January 2025 to 81 by September 2025.
- Our practitioners work hard to build positive, trusting relationships with their young people. In 71% of in-service audits undertaken so far in 2025, practice in relation to the voice of the child was rated good or better, whilst 83% of cross service Learning Conversations focused on care leavers over the same period were rated good or better for child focused practice.
- In July 2025, we opened our new Care Leavers Hub - Sonder Space. We are working with our care leavers to plan a range of activities, inside and outside the Hub, that will offer them new opportunities to get together, from cooking, to DIY skills, to exploring the world. We held a BBQ in Sonder Space on 11th September that was attended by 40 young people. In September 2025 eight of our care leavers went with Leaving Care staff for an outward bound trip in the Lake District. Next Easter, a further 10 young people will be travelling with the Virtual School and Leaving Care Service to Ghana. A range of activities, including a film night, are planned at the hub for National Care Leavers week (November 2025).
- To support the transition from the Children Looked After Service to the Leaving Care Service we have added (as of Aug 2025) a post 18 check in point by the Independent Reviewing Officer with the care leaver six months after turning 18. This is to support the transition between services and improve the continuity of plans for the care leaver. To further support transition between services and teams we will (as of January 2026, following a pilot of this approach) ensure that the Leaving Care allocated practitioner will be invited to the Review meetings from when the young person turns 17.
- The Service also continues to diversify the ways we try to keep in touch with our young people. In addition to regular email and text bulletins to all our care leavers, we try to reach out specifically to our care leavers who are not receiving active practitioner support each year around their birthdays, to revisit our offer of support with them. As of September 2025, 99% of care leavers under the age of 21 were consenting to active practitioner support, whilst 30% of care leavers aged 21 to 25 were also accessing allocated practitioner support. We have improved our data recording and reporting systems, so that we have live data on care leavers accommodation types, emails and phone numbers, so we can monitor these and take steps when needed to try and confirm current contact details for all our young people.
- All Hackney care leavers living in Hackney are now exempt from paying Council tax up to the age of 25. In 2024, we agreed to match this offer for those living out of borough. By September 2025, we had supported our young people with more than £20,000 worth of Council tax payments through this new offer.
- We revamped our Pathway Plans in March 2025 in order to strengthen their quality, including in relation to multi-agency contributions and increased focus on young people's future aspirations. A dip sample of 30 Pathway Plans was carried out in September 2025. These

suggested that the new format is largely working well, however, some minor amendments will be made, e.g. to prompt for more information about exploration around life story work.

- After introducing Care Leavers Ambassador roles in September 2023, in March 2025 we successfully recruited our second cohort of Ambassadors, to help represent the voices of our care experienced young people in key decision-making forums, like our Corporate Parenting Board. We advertised via our text messaging system and were delighted that we had strong applicants. In Autumn 2025 we will move our participation work into the Children's Rights Service, so that we can draw upon the advocacy skills and pre-existing relationships this team have with many of our care experienced children and young people, to widen our participation reach.
- In September 2025 we increased our Education Bursary from £1,000 to £1,300 to better support care leavers at university with costs of rent deposits (this is in addition to the £2,000 p/a grant given by the DfE).
- In 2024/25 our Virtual School introduced a new termly check-in meeting for all those at university, with the young people, their Leaving Care practitioners and university tutors, to ensure that we are doing everything we can do to support them to succeed in their courses.
- We are proud of our care leavers who go on to be amazing parents and are committed to continuing to try to be the very best corporate grandparents that we can be. Audits carried out in July 2025 reassured us about our practice in this area - 70% were rated as good - whilst they supported us to continue to think about ways we can improve our offer to this cohort.
- To enhance capacity in Leaving Care, two additional Personal Advisors were recruited in 2024. In September 2024, we introduced quarterly practice development days specifically for Leaving Care staff. We have enrolled one of our Personal Advisors on Become's accredited training programme from October 2025. We are also working with Adult Social Care colleagues to access some of their relevant training, for example, in relation to Mental Capacity Assessments.
- All Hackney care leavers have the opportunity to access therapeutic support from the in-house Clinical Team. As of September 2025, 29 care leavers are accessing a therapeutic intervention. In line with feedback from our care leavers that they would like to access this clinical support in a more flexible way, from September 2025 a new clinical drop in for them is being launched at Sonder Space.
- In 2024/25, 58 care leavers accessed support from the Children's Rights team - this is often around understanding their rights and entitlements. Our web-based [Local Offer](#) is regularly reviewed and updated which also provides detail on all support available to care experienced young people.
- We have a clear commitment to delivering anti-racist practice in a corporate parenting context, which includes celebrating our children and young people's heritage; educating ourselves and them about racism; and being visible advocates for change.

Next Steps

- We know that practice to support the transitions to adulthood needs to improve. This includes the transition of disabled looked after children to Adult Social Care (ASC) which needs to improve: 7 audits undertaken of care leavers open to ASC in January 2025 highlighted that whilst the

Leaving Care practice with 5 out of 7 was good, significant delays in Care Act Assessments undertaken by ASC for the same number significantly impeded timely, well coordinated transition planning. We are working closely with ASC colleagues in the redesign of their Preparation for Adulthood Service, due to launch in winter 2025, which we hope will improve the service. We also know there is work to do to improve the experience of all our care leavers through the transition to adulthood. In April 2025 we launched a pilot of dual allocation with a Leaving Care practitioner from 17. To date 17 looked after children have benefited from this. Whilst there are capacity implications for Leaving Care in rolling this out to all looked after children, this is our ambition.

- Like elsewhere in the country, we are worried about the proportion of our care leavers who are not in education, training or employment. We are committed to the pan-London work to create a Family Business Model for care leavers. We have an 18+ team within our Virtual School that offers proactive, targeted support to this cohort. Sadly, the proportion of Hackney care leavers aged 19 to 21 who were in education, employment or training in 2024/25 was 58%, albeit up from 56% the previous year. The Council's Hackney Works team have secured funding through the government's Trailblazers initiative to support more care leavers into education, training and employment. A number of our care leavers are high achievers: 9% in higher education in 2024/25, which is higher than the most recent statistical neighbours and national average.
- Sadly, we have a significant number of care leavers in custody (36 as of September 2025) and a high proportion (44%) became looked after by virtue of being on remand as children, which creates challenges in relationship building, given they have no real affiliation with the identity of being care experienced. A review of all these young people undertaken in June 2025 indicates this cohort needs to remain an area of focus for us, with greater attention paid to escalation where there are concerns about access and support to care leavers within the prison system, on an individual and systemic level. We have committed to reviewing these young people at a senior management level every 4 months.
- We have committed to signing up to an Immigration Pledge with the South London Refugee Association, to work towards best practice on immigration issues for all our care experienced children and young people.
- We have continued to work closely with our Looked After Health Team to try and improve the quality of health summaries and ensure all young people are receiving them in a timely way. Work undertaken over the summer on new reporting functionalities has enabled us to ensure all young people up to the age of 20 have received a summary. Feedback was received care leavers suggested there is more work to do to ensure they receive and review the contents of their summaries in a timely way.
- In line with best practice guidance from the Information Commissioner's Officer around sharing records with care leavers, a new process is being piloted between the Leaving Care Service and the Council's Information Management Team, in order to try and improve the processes for accessing their records for care leavers.
- Whilst we have strengthened the format of the Pathway Plan, to prompt for more detailed information about safety and safety planning, we would like to see more stand alone safety plans, co-created with young people, that reflect presenting areas of risk, such as self harm and extra-familial risk.



Participation and direct work with children in care and care leavers

[Hackney of Tomorrow](#) is our Children in Care Council and acts as a voice for all children in care and care leavers from Hackney, communicating their views to senior management and key 'decision-makers' within the Corporate Parenting space. Over the past year, Hackney of Tomorrow has delivered a series of successful participation projects, including:

- **Family Time Consultation:** Through a survey and focus groups, looked after children told us that they wanted more opportunities to see all of their loved ones, with less professional supervision.
- **Skills to Foster Training:** Hackney of Tomorrow continues to deliver training for prospective foster carers as part of Hackney's Skills to Foster programme.
- **Children's Home Consultations:** Young people with lived experience of residential homes were consulted for their views to help shape our plans to develop new homes in the borough.
- **Hackney of Tomorrow 'Take Over' of the Corporate Parenting Board:** In October 2024 set and led the agenda for the Board, with discussions including access to files and the impact of this of the cyber attack on the Council in 2020; what is being done to support education, training and employment opportunities for care leavers; and housing pathways.
- **Youth Inspection of Support Accommodation Pathways:** In the summer, Hackney of Tomorrow carried out a number of youth inspections on our commissioned providers, then shared their findings with the Corporate Parenting Board.
- **Care Leaver Ambassadors:** After the successful launch of this role in 2023, two new Ambassadors joined us in 2025, following a very competitive process (with 61 applicants) to support our participation work for up to 20 hours each month.

As noted above, in the year ahead, we plan to move the coordination of the participation work into the Children's Rights Service.

Section 5: The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families



Strategic Leadership - Driving improvement

In the past year we have maintained a sharp focus on supporting our residents and there is a strong political and corporate commitment to the Children and Education Group Directorate. Within our Group Directorate we have kept a strong focus on proactive leadership, strengthening practice, improving outcomes for children and on greater collegiate working.

Workforce Stability, Caseloads and Training

We are committed to ensuring that caseloads are manageable across the service and we are glad that our progress in this area was recognised by Ofsted during their recent ILACS inspection in July 2024. This has been achieved by ensuring that we are constantly thinking about our recruitment and retention of staff, and we have introduced a number of measures to do this. Measures include a retention bonus of £1500 every 6 months for social workers and senior social workers within Assessment & Planning and Child Protection service areas; a streamlined process for agency social workers to progress into permanent roles; strengthened induction periods for new starters; improved support and oversight of students and ASYEs as well as enhanced pay for our ASYEs. In addition the change to statutory guidance, stipulating that agency social workers need a minimum of three years' post-qualifying experience in children's services in an English local authority, has contributed to an increase in agency workers taking permanent social work roles in Hackney.

We are also working to ensure that there are clear career progression frameworks for key roles, so that staff understand what experience, qualifications and skills they need to progress and managers understand how to support them to achieve this. A comprehensive Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) offer supports our newly qualified social workers and an extensive training programme is in place for all staff. Following the feedback from Ofsted during the ILACS in July 2024, we are working to ensure that all non-social worker roles are also clear about the training and development opportunities available to them.

Improving Outcomes for Children Board

We have refreshed our monthly Improving Outcomes for Children Board to better evidence and scrutinise the quality of our practice. The refreshed meeting is enhanced by thinking about our practice and performance through the STAR lens, with agreed principles for how the group will do this. The

Board ensures there is shared learning and supportive challenge to each other to deliver best practice for our children and families. Managers present their key performance data and quality assurance information, alongside key issues and improvements in their service. The meeting is chaired by the Director of Children's Social Care and is a key part of the Quality Assurance Framework. The Board focuses on three cohorts of children according to their status and journey through the system, scrutinising practice and highlighting strengths that can be built upon, agreeing purposeful actions to support continuous practice improvement. Each cohort is reviewed at least once per school term.

Supervision

Supervision about children, families and carers is a critical function of understanding the quality of practice and ensuring plans are progressing in line with children's needs. Individual reflective supervision is also key to ensuring our staff are able to reflect on their practice and development and explore issues that may impact on their practice with families, so that staff and families are kept safe and feel supported. Supervision about children, families and carers is monitored via regular Mosaic reporting, as well as via the Improving Outcomes for Children Board and through our auditing programme. We have refreshed our Supervision Policy and templates to ensure that individual reflective supervision for staff across CFS is held using the STAR model, and rolled out training to managers to support this. Our current position is that we have developed an anti-racist approach to supervision but we have more work to do to ensure that this is embedded and that it is also systemic and trauma informed. Teams are also supported via Group Supervision to share learning and experience across the team when thinking about our families.

Children's Social Care restructure

Children's Social Care completed a restructure of management layers with the new structure going live in January 2025. The new structure removed the Consultant Social Worker and Practice Development Manager roles, replacing them with a Team Manager role, who directly manages frontline social workers. Additional Service Manager posts were also created along with the introduction of a Practice Lead role to ensure the quality of practice in service areas. Senior Social Worker posts were also created in each team within each service area. This has enhanced and simplified the oversight of practice by managers and strengthened our service delivery, as well as prioritised continuous improvement. This new structure increases service resilience and sustainability for the future, with clear career pathways for practice staff.



Quality Assurance

We have a strong learning culture across the Children and Families Service, underpinned by a service-wide learning framework and overseen by our Improving Outcomes for Children Board. Our quality assurance and performance management information evidences continuous improvement in the quality of practice and helps us to understand the experience of children and families who access our service.

We hold Learning Conversations (audits) which are themed deep dives into areas of practice that we want to know more about or improve. Learning Conversations are analysed and results detailed in an overview report identifying clear service-wide actions as well as case-level actions that are tracked via supervision. We hold reflective learning sessions following each round of Learning Conversations with leaders to identify key changes for their service area. Learning Conversations are moderated and we review any cases that are graded as less than good to see what impact the audit has had for the child. Since April 2024 we have undertaken Learning Conversations on the themes of: Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (May 2024), Young Carers (Oct 2024), Parental Mental Health (March 2024), Transitions (June 2025) and Anti-Racist Practice (Sept 2025).

In addition to this, each service area will also undertake audits and dip samples specific to their area of practice which help to understand compliance against key practice standards as well as understanding quality against service-specific issues. Service areas will also take part in peer reviews, multi-agency audits and learning reviews. Areas of focus over the last year have included: voice of the child, supervision, Care Leavers, SEND, Stop & Search and working with fathers.

During the last year work has continued to ensure that all families and children are provided with opportunities to provide feedback. This has been facilitated by continuing to ensure that families are provided with an opportunity to complete a written survey either at the end or during CFS involvement. In addition this year has seen the introduction of a process by which social work managers contact families to talk to them about their experience of receiving a service from CFS to understand how they have experienced this. Three SHOUT surveys were undertaken with children and young people with the focus on Young Carers, those receiving support from the Children's Rights service and those receiving support around extra familial harm. Work is underway to provide training to frontline staff to help them make effective use of Mind of My Own app which enables young people and their workers to communicate with practitioners independently and in their own words.

Strengths

- Well established and impactful audit programme that shows our strengths and areas for development as a service.
- Children and families tell us that we are making a difference to their lives.
- Quality assurance and performance information shows that our practice has moved from a 'requires improvement' service to a 'good' service, with leaders having a clear grip on challenges in their service area.

Next Steps

- Continued work to increase opportunities for children and families to provide feedback and to seek professional feedback.
- Ensure audit activity continues at a rate and volume that ensures effective scrutiny and opportunity to maximise learning and improvement.
- Refine processes to identify the impact of learning from across the range of quality assurance activities including audits, complaints and feedback from children and families.
- Further develop working arrangements with Practice Leads to drive improvement and further refine quality assurance activity in their service areas.



Anti-Racism

The commitment to tackling racism in Hackney has deep roots, intensified by the Black Lives Matter motion passed by Hackney Council in July 2020. This motion set a clear agenda for improving outcomes for Black and Global Majority children and families. Following this, the directorate released its [Anti-Racist Position Statement](#) and launched a dedicated Anti-Racist Action Plan in September 2020. The core ambition is to proactively address racism, discrimination and inequality, thereby reducing disproportionality in poorer outcomes.

Hackney's journey has been marked by several significant milestones, embedding anti-racist principles across the Children and Families Service (CFS) and wider council:

- **Practice and Standards:**
 - Development and adoption of [Anti-Racist Practice Standards](#).
 - Anti-Racist Supervision training has been rolled out to many managers, with further cohorts planned.
- **Workforce Development and Support:**
 - Ongoing delivery of Anti-Racist Practice Programme of Reflective Learning (Action Learning Sets).

- Realising Potential Programme for Black and Global Majority staff and a Systems leader programme for senior leads were delivered in 2024/25. A further Realising Potential programme is planned for early 2026.
- A Safe Spaces offer of therapeutic support for staff experiencing racialised trauma.
- Implementation of diverse recruitment panels.
- The Anti Racist Practice Staff Reference Group (ARP-SRG), a model of good practice, met for over a year, involving over 30 staff before its final meeting in Summer 2024. Its achievements included shaping Anti-Racist Supervision, the Safe Spaces offer, and the DRIP (Delivering Race Equality in Practice) joint action plan.
- CFS participated in its first Skills for Care Social Care Workforce Racial Equality Standards (SC-WRES) in 2024/25 and has recently completed the data submission for the WRES for 2025/26. The SC-WRES uses nine indicators to track data on the experiences of Black and Global Majority staff annually. Actions arising have been added to the directorate ARP Action Plan.
- **Council-Wide Engagement and Structure:**
 - Anti-Racism work is a core component of the Children's Service Improvement Action Plan: Priority 1 - Proud to be STAR (Systemic, Trauma Informed and Anti Racist).
 - A dedicated Anti-Racism service was established (Jan 2023) and has moved to the corporate centre. An Anti-Racist Practice Strategic Lead was appointed permanently (Aug 2025) within CFS.

Next Steps

- ARP Consultations were launched in November 2025 to support practitioners working with children and families where racism is a factor, covering structural inequality, racial bias, and more.
- Introduction to ARP induction training will be provided to all new starters, focusing on embedding the Anti-Racist Practice Standards and the STAR approach.
- Further embedding the Anti-Racist Practice Standards through review, development of good practice examples and creation of an ARP newsletter.
- A Mentoring Offer for Black and Global Majority Staff is being launched to provide culturally competent, trauma-informed support to address unique developmental needs and systemic challenges.
- Roll out of further Psychological Safety training for managers and senior leaders and additional ARP supervision training.
- Systemic and Trauma Informed training with Anti-Racism embedded within it is being commissioned for staff across the directorate (with the plan to start delivery of training in April 2026).
- CFS is developing an Equality, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging (EEDIB) board to champion these initiatives.
- A focus on co-working with Hackney Education is aimed at integrating anti-racist principles into learning environments.

Section 6: Financial Update

The outturn for 2024/25 for the Children and Families Service on a net budget of £70.6m was an overspend of £6.1m after use of grants and reserves of £18.0m, of which £17.1m is Social Care Grant funding. There has been a requirement to draw down from reserves since 2012/13 due to the increase in complexity and the number of children in care.

The financial position for 2025/26 is a net budget of £70.2m for the Children and Families Service, and the service is forecasting to underspend by £0.5m (as at August 2025) after use of reserves and drawdown of grants totalling £20.6m (including full use of the £20.4m of Social Care Grant funding).

The Children and Families Service has continued to make contributions to the efficiency agenda of the Council. Over the previous twelve years the service has delivered £15.0m savings. The increase in commissioning costs has been driven by an increase in complexity and the number of looked after children since 2011/12. We continue to seek to recruit in-house foster carers where possible rather than using independent fostering services.

Hackney has seen an increase in residential placements since 2015 adding considerable budget pressures with an average annual unit cost of circa £370k. Recently there have been some reductions in the number of residential placements and high cost packages which have driven the predicted service underspend in 2025/26. The service is susceptible to variation due it being demand-led. Additionally, the complexity of placement needs can add a considerable cost and resource availability over holiday periods impact on demand and budget pressures due to care arrangements breaking down and family breakdowns. The Group Director of Finance & Corporate Resources recognised the growing pressure in placements. Since 2020, the placement budget has received growth of circa £17.4m which has made it possible for the service to deliver within budget (as at August 2025).

Appendix - Governance and Accountability



**City and Hackney
Safeguarding Children
Partnership**
Independent Chair



VAWG Board
Violence Against Women and
Girls
Chair: Director CSC



MAPPA
Multi Agency Public Protection
Arrangement



**City and Hackney
Safeguarding Adults
Board**



SEND Board
Chair: AD for SEND, NHS
Strategic Lead for C&YP



MARAC
Multi-Agency Risk
Assessment Conference



**Health and Wellbeing
Board**
Chair: Hackney Councillor



Corporate Parenting
Chair: Member for Children
and Education, Hackney



**MACE - Multi-Agency Child
Exploitation**



**Children and Young
People Scrutiny
Commission**



**Community Safety
Partnership**
Co-Chairs: LBH Chief Exec/
Borough Commander,
Hackney Police



**Safer Young Hackney
Strategic Board**
Chair: Group Director
Children and Education



**City & Hackney
Place-Based Partnership**

Appendix - Key Children and Families Service Data 2024/25

Young Hackney

Services Accessed by Young People	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Young Hackney Universal Services	16,811	17,084*	14,291
Young Hackney Targeted Support	1,410	1,356	1,223

**based upon 164,643 named and anonymous attendances*

Youth Justice

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
No. of first time entrants to Youth Justice system in Hackney	79	67	54	51	68

Contacts

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	April - Sept 2025
Number of contacts	12,313	14,248	14,681	14,649	6,891
% of contacts progressing to a referral	29%	29%	26%	25%	19%

Referrals

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	April - Sept 2025
Number of Referrals	3,559	4,148	3,782	3,653	1,276
Rate of Referrals per 10,000 population	639	753	696	674	232
Statistical neighbours	673	622	631	619	N/A
England	553	539	518	519	N/A

	Outturn 2021/22	Outturn 2022/23	Outturn 2023/24	Outturn 2024/25	April - Sept 2025
Percentage of referrals which were re-referrals (had been open in the past 12 months)	17%	20%	20%	19%	20%
Statistical neighbours	19%	19%	19%	19%	N/A
England	20%	21%	21%	23%	N/A

Assessments

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	April - Sept 2025
Number of social work assessments completed	3,244	3,998	3,556	3,387	1,214
Rate of assessments completed per 10,000 population	538	726	654	635	220
Statistical neighbours	639	604	623	606	N/A
England	548	552	536	533	N/A

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	April - Sept 2025
% of social work assessments completed within 45 working days	82%	69%	82%	91%	93%
Statistical neighbours	90%	90%	86%	85%	N/A
England	90%	88%	86%	86%	N/A

Section 47 Investigations

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	April - Sept 2025
Number of Section 47 investigations started	825	1326	1306	1352	536
Number of Section 47 investigations started per 10,000 population	148	241	240	249	97
Statistical neighbours	223	221	228	235	NA
England	185	190	187	189	NA

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	April - Sept 2025
% of Section 47 investigations that resulted in an Initial Child Protection Conference	32%	24%	27%	25%	34%
Statistical neighbours	29%	28%	29%	26%	NA
England	34%	33%	32%	31%	NA

Children Supported on Child in Needs Plans

	March 2023	March 2024	March 2025	Sept 2025
Snapshot of children supported on Child in Need Plans	421	387	414	346

Child Protection Plans

	March 2022	March 2023	March 2024	March 2025	Sept 2025
Number of children supported on Child Protection Plans (snapshot)	211	181	215	225	200

Children supported on Child Protection Plans per 10 000 population

	March 2022	March 2023	March 2024	March 2025	Sept 2025
Hackney	38	33	39	42	36
Statistical Neighbour	47	42	44	40	NA
England	42	43	42	41	NA

Duration of closed Child Protection Plans (percentage)

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	April - Sept 2025
Under 3 months	19%	17%	25%	13%	16%
3 - 6 months	12%	9%	11%	17%	15%
6 - 12 months	38%	42%	46%	44%	36%
1 - 2 years	30%	29%	18%	24%	31%

2+ years	1%	4%	1%	3%	2%
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Pre-proceedings and PLO

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	April - Sept 2025
Hackney number of care applications	51	87	76	58	40
Hackney care applications per 10,000 child population	7.6	15.6	n/a	n/a	n/a
England care applications per 10,000 child population	9.7	9.6	n/a	n/a	n/a

Disabled Children's Service (DCS) As at December 2025

Children known to DCS	440
Children currently allocated to DCS Unit 1 and DCS Unit 2	135
Children allocated for Annual Care Package Review	305
Children receiving a care package	385
Children who receive overnight respite out of the home as part of their care package	14
Children supported on Child in Need plans managed by DCS	11
Children supported on Child Protection plans managed by DCS	7
Children subject to Legal proceedings managed by DCS	13

Children who are Looked After and currently open to DCS

4

Children in Care

	March 2022	March 2023	March 2024	March 2025	Sept 2025
Number of children in care at snapshot date	405	392	382	352	357

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	April - Sept 2025
Children entering care	163	185	150	133	71
Children leaving care	187	204	155	160	64

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	April - Sept 2025
Rate of children in care per 10,000	73	71	70	65	65
Statistical neighbours	72	70	69	66	NA
England	70	71	70	67	NA

Stability and permanence

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	April - Sept 2025
Percentage of looked after children with three or more care arrangements in one year	14%	15%	13%	12%	10%
Statistical neighbours	10%	10%	11%	10%	NA
England	10%	10%	10%	10%	NA

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	April - Sept 2025
The percentage of children aged under 16 who have been looked after for more than 2.5 years, who have lived in the same home for over 2 year	71%	64%	62%	72%	77%
Statistical neighbours	70%	66%	67%	68%	NA
England	71%	69%	68%	69%	NA

Health of Looked After Children

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Percentage of looked after children whose health checks were in time during a 12 month period	95%	92%	96%	97%
Statistical neighbours	91%	92%	94%	94%
England	89%	89%	89%	90%

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Percentage of looked after children whose immunisations are up to date	56%	84%	64%	62%
Statistical neighbours	76%	73%	73%	77%
England	85%	82%	82%	84%

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Percentage of looked after children who have an up to date dental check	71%	89%	88%	88%
Statistical neighbours	67%	73%	80%	87%
England	70%	76%	79%	81%

Education of Looked After Children

Key Stage 4 Attainment in 2023

The published data this year shows a poor set of matches and out of 54 students published data was only available for 16 children.

Percentage of children achieving Grade 4 and above at Key Stage 4

	Grade 4 and above
English level 4+	26%
Maths level 4+	19.5%
English level 5+	10%
Maths level 5+	10%

Key Stage 2 Attainment in 2023

The published data this year was for 13 out of a total cohort of 17 children.

Percentage of children working at the required standard or above at Key Stage 2

	Working at the required standard or greater depth
Reading	62%
Writing	56%
Maths	56%

Care Leavers

	March 2021	March 2022	March 2023	March 2024	March 2025	Sept 2025
Total number of former relevant Care Leavers (17 - 21 year old)	376	391	402	381	334	276

	March 2021	March 2022	March 2023	March 2024	March 2025	Sept 2025
Percentage of care leavers aged 19 - 21 who were in education, employment or training	56%	69%	63%	56%	58%	45%
Statistical neighbours	63%	64%	60%	61%	60%	NA
England	52%	55%	56%	54%	54%	NA

	March 2021	March 2022	March 2023	March 2024	March 2025	Sept 2025
Percentage of care leavers aged 19 - 21 in suitable accommodation	87%	88%	88%	84%	85%	71%
Statistical neighbours	87%	87%	88%	88%	89%	NA
England	88%	88%	88%	88%	89%	NA

Workforce Data

Percentage of agency social workers (FTE) as at date

	Sept 2020	Sept 2021	Sept 2022	Sept 2023	Sept 2024	Sept 2025
Hackney	32%	22%	28.5%	29%	31.7%	21.5%
Statistical Neighbour	21%	20%	25%	24.9%	23.5%	NA
England	15.4%	15.5%	18%	18%	16%	NA

Percentage rate of social worker turnover (in year to date shown)

	Sept 2020	Sept 2021	Sept 2022	Sept 2023	Sept 2024*	Sept 2025
Hackney	15.9%	11.7%	21.6%	14%	13.8%	11.3%
Statistical Neighbour	15%	17%	15%	16%	14.4%	NA
England	13.5%	15%	17%	16%	14.4%	NA

Cases (children) per social worker (based on FTE equivalents) as at date - (this is updated annually)

	Sept 2020	Sept 2021	Sept 2022	Sept 2023	Sept 2024*	Sept 2025
Hackney	16.4	14	15.4	14.7	14.4	13.9
Statistical Neighbour	14.2	15	14.3	13.7	13.1	NA
England	16.3	16.3	16.6	16.0	15.4	NA