

Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission

Thursday 23 July 2026

7.00 pm

Ground Floor Meeting Room G01A - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

Membership

Councillor Rachael Penny (Chair)
Councillor Hellen Benavides (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Jasmine Ali
Councillor John Batteson
Councillor Callum Fowler
Councillor Tori Griffiths
Councillor Felicia Johnston
Martin Brecknell (Co-opted member)
Alie Kallon (Co-opted member)
Mannah Kargbo (Co-opted member)
Claire Williams (Co-opted member)

Reserves

Councillor Colin Boyle
Councillor Ryan Cox
Councillor Selena Gray
Councillor Richard Leeming
Councillor Sunny Lambe
Councillor Patrickson Amechi Obanya
Councillor Jen Thornton

INFORMATION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Access to information

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Contact

Amit Alva on e-mail: amit.alva@southwark.gov.uk

Members of the committee are summoned to attend this meeting

Althea Loderick

Chief Executive

Date: 15 July 2026



Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission

Thursday 23 July 2026
7.00 pm
Ground Floor Meeting Room G01A - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

Order of Business

Item No.	Title	Page No.
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PART A OPEN BUSINESS

1. APOLOGIES

To receive any apologies for absence.

**2. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS WHICH THE
CHAIR DEEMS URGENT**

In special circumstances, an item of business may be added to an agenda within five clear working days of the meeting.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS.

Members to declare any interests and dispensations in respect of any item of business to be considered at this meeting.

4. MINUTES

1 - 7

To note the Minutes of the meeting held on 26 February 2026.

**5. GENERAL UPDATE ON BERMONDSEY BLUE - BUSINESS
IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT (BID)**

To receive a general update from Ben Davies on Bermondsey Blue, Business Improvement District.

Item No.	Title	Page No.
6.	OUTCOME OF OFSTED INSPECTION OF LOCAL AUTHORITY CHILDREN'S SERVICES (ILACS)	8 - 31
	To receive a report from Helen Woolgar, Deputy Director, Children's Services on the Outcome of Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS)	
7.	WORK PROGRAMME DISCUSSION 2026-27	32 - 36
	To consider potential scrutiny topics for inclusion in the commission's work programme for the 2026-27 municipal year.	
	DISCUSSION OF ANY OTHER OPEN ITEMS AS NOTIFIED AT THE START OF THE MEETING.	

Date: 15 July 2026



Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission held on Thursday 26 February 2026 at 7.00 pm at Ground Floor Meeting Room G02A - 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH

PRESENT: Councillor Cassandra Brown (Chair)
Councillor Rachel Bentley
Councillor Margy Newens
Councillor Youcef Hassaine
Martin Brecknell (Co-opted Member)
Alie Kallon (Co-opted Member)
Mannah Kargbo (Co-opted Member)

OTHER MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillor John Batteson

OFFICER SUPPORT: Amit Alva, Scrutiny Officer

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Irina Von Wiese and Co-opted Member Claire Williams.

Apologies for lateness were received from Councillor Margy Newens.

2. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT

There were no items of business which the Chair deemed urgent.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

There were no disclosures of interest or dispensations.

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 February 2026 were approved as a correct record.

5. CABINET MEMBER INTERVIEW - CABINET MEMBER FOR CLIMATE EMERGENCY, JOBS AND BUSINESS

The Chair invited Councillor John Batteson, Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency, Jobs and Transport (change in portfolio title as of 25 February 2026 Council Assembly, prior to agenda summons publication); supported by Danny Edwards (Assistant Director of Economy) and Mark Grant (Assistant Director of Property) to give an overview of the portfolio across the year.

On local economy and routes into employment, the Cabinet Member noted that:

- the Council Delivery Plan is committed to supporting 2,500 residents from priority cohorts into work, 2,900 had gained work, primarily through Southwark Works
- residents in these priority cohorts faced the highest barriers and achieving progress in this area was therefore extremely important for raising prosperity and addressing inequalities
- Southwark Works had been active for 21 years, supporting, on average, 400 people into work with a second hub opening 3-4 weeks ago, in Peckham
- the new hub was made possible through central government funding and was directed at supporting residents with complex health barriers and disabilities via individual, tailored job support
- the Youth Trailblazer's support for care leavers trialled new practices to increase employment outcomes for care leavers – initially funded for one year, that had been extended
- the progress made on Youth Trailblazers had been shared with the Corporate Parenting Committee given their keen interest in care leavers' employment
- a new Skills Delivery Plan was being adopted with aims adjusted to reflect where more work was needed and where success had already been made
- by Q3, the number of new apprenticeships supported was greater than the full year target
- the nature of apprenticeships had shifted – there were more higher-level apprenticeships than lower level – and in the future it would help to report more closely on the latter so that routes into employment were not cut off for those without higher level qualifications or training
- regarding paid internships for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, targets here had also been exceeded

On business development and the Town Centre Action Plans, he noted:

- the aims of the Southwark Pioneers Fund had been met – supporting underrepresented groups to start and develop businesses – and new funding was being sought as previously this had come from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and no more funding would be provided
- that funding was not the only issue, however, with local businesses also asking for skills opportunities, something that the Supplier Readiness Programme had helped with, in particular regarding developing their preparedness to bid for contracts in the Council and elsewhere
- a focus on procurement could also help by redesigning larger contracts, where appropriate, so that smaller businesses could participate in bidding for parts of them
- the Town Centre Action Plans had been well received as a way of keeping local businesses and residents informed of immediate and longer-term actions in their area

On the Living Wage, he noted that:

- the Council's ambition to double the number of accredited Living Wage employers from 298 in 2022 had been challenging although over 450 employers had now been accredited
- the challenge resulted from a slowdown in employers becoming accredited as this required them to pay a fee to the Living Wage Foundation
- Living Wage Foundation-reporting showed that 7,000 employees received a pay rise as a result of employers becoming accredited and paying the Living Wage
- the work reflected strong partnership efforts across employers and the Living Wage Action Group, showing that progress required collaboration beyond the council alone
- effective advocacy remained essential to encourage more employers to adopt and champion the Living Wage

In terms of commercial property, Councillor Batteson reported that:

- Council-owned properties on high streets sometimes included both the shop-level commercial unit and residential properties (above a shop parade, for example)
- such properties generated revenue and also allowed the Council some control over the kind of business or organisation taking tenancy and, through this, an additional means for it to contribute to shaping town centres and high streets
- an important consideration was how the Council might use some commercial properties to provide affordable workspace and to support the voluntary and community sector (VCS)
- repairs were a priority and it was recognised that where residential properties were located above commercial premises, additional challenges

existed e.g. in terms of access although these were managed in the same way as purely residential repairs and communications with the Housing Department indicated awareness of repairs' potential effects on businesses

The Chair then invited questions from the Commission. These included:

- whether – given some employers' efforts to increase in-office working – promoting affordable workspace remained an efficient use of resources and whether an evaluation of need had been conducted
- if a specific work experience programme for children with SEND had been explored
- what progress had been made on commercial property portfolio issues such as arrears and rent negotiations
- how the Council was encouraging employers to employ young people with SEND
- what overlap existed between apprenticeships, green jobs and construction skills
- when looking back over the administration, what the Cabinet Member was most proud of in terms of achievements, what the biggest challenge had been and what they would have done differently
- why there was a shift to more higher level apprenticeships
- why the UK Shared Prosperity Fund had finished
- how the Living Wage might be strengthened including through the procurement framework and contractors
- what a blue-sky solution might be for the challenge around commercial repairs due to water ingress from Council residential properties (given a pressured HRA)
- whether accessing support from Southwark Works required a referral
- the differences between placements and apprenticeships
- the means the Council had for checking that contractors paid the London Living Wage to their employees for delivery of contracts with the Council (as they were bound to, given the Council's status as an accredited Living Wage Employer)

Councillor Batteson, supported where appropriate by Danny and Mark (the relevant officers), responded that:

- the affordable workplace strategy was adopted last year – this included the facility for developments to provide payments to the Council in lieu of building commercial space so enabling the Council to create workspace hubs and have a greater say in who qualifies for these spaces, and where they are located – a recommendation from the land commission
- a pilot workspace hub in Peckham was in development
- more work on evaluating need should be carried out
- mapping of affordable workspace was being undertaken so that businesses and individuals could be informed easily of the opportunities available
- colleagues from a range of departments worked to make sure pathways

connected so that children with SEND had real opportunities in terms of work experience

- Southwark Works' biggest contract was to support vulnerable young people, including young people with SEND and others, into employment
- repairs due to water ingress, for example, in Council-owned residential properties were linked to the responsibilities for commercial spaces through the need to compensate businesses when they suffered water damage or had their activities curtailed
- the cost of repair work was significant as it often involved major works rather than 'patching up' a single issue
- commercial rental income had grown from £18million (pre-Covid) to £25.5million and was growing
- debt had also increased due to invoices for rent showing immediately as debt – as rent revenue had increased so, inevitably, had this component of debt
- historic bad debt had not been written off so this made current debt seem larger than it might otherwise
- the income from commercial rent was important but large increases which could threaten the long-term sustainability of businesses were not desirable
- extra resources in the legal and property teams would help to increase the pace of processing
- tenants did not always have representation when in dispute with the Council and this could slow down negotiations
- the Council itself could lead on inclusive recruitment as well as, externally, in identifying employers already recruiting and supporting the development of young people with SEND
- this work was especially challenging when the general environment for young people seeking employment was difficult
- with Southwark Works, for example, ongoing support for young people was built into the model – Connect to Work also provided similar support
- resource and capacity were currently a key limiting factor
- the Council had engaged larger employers who might have more capacity for supporting additional needs and had been asking them what they needed in terms of making it easier to create opportunities for younger people
- apprenticeships, green jobs and construction skills and the opportunities for connecting them were highly integrated
- the Council used the Central London Forward definition of a green job i.e. one that contributed to net zero
- ensuring news about Southwark Works' programmes and the people it was charged with supporting would, by its nature, remain a challenge in spite of the success it had had
- regarding apprenticeships, it was likely the levy had encouraged organisations to focus on higher level apprenticeships rather than apprenticeships as an entry level route into careers and professions
- better reporting of apprenticeships across levels would allow greater comparability against other London boroughs and nationally, therefore

helping with understanding how the Council might use additional levers to shape how apprenticeships are created and used

- the Pride in Place Programme had replaced the UK Shared Prosperity Fund but the Council was not due to get any funds from this
- regarding the Living Wage, the important point was that employees were paid it rather than whether their employer was accredited
- notwithstanding the above, discussions were due to take place with the Living Wage Foundation about how the accreditation costs for employers might be kept down
- there was a requirement that all businesses taking on commercial leases, whether new lettings or renewals, must pay staff the London Living Wage
- in terms of managing commercial repairs, work had already focused on tightening communications between commercial property and relevant housing teams so that issues raised could be dealt with as quickly as possible and that commercial repairs were treated with the correct priority
- commercial properties were included in the Stock Condition Survey and this was revealing the works needed whilst allowing these to be planned and budgeted for (i.e. rather than being dealt with reactively)
- Southwark Works was open – referrals were not necessary although if convenient, appointments could be made
- while placements or internships generally lasted a matter of months, apprenticeships were longer-term and provided structured learning opportunities alongside work
- officers who procure and officers who managed contracts were responsible for monitoring the implementation of a contract's stipulation regarding contracted employees being paid the London Living Wage – in practice, however, the assurance of contracted companies was taken in good faith

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member, Councillor John Batteson, and officers Danny Edwards and Mark Grant.

6. DRAFT SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS - EDUCATION AND LOCAL ECONOMY SCRUTINY COMMISSION

The Chair introduced the item by taking the Draft Scrutiny Recommendations report as read and inviting feedback and additional comments.

The Commission drafted and agreed additional recommendations (to be fine-tuned after the meeting). The final report would therefore include recommendations from the draft report and the following recommendations, summarised as follows, that Cabinet:

- review whether the London Living Wage is being paid to contracted employees delivering contracts for the Council
- promote the activities of Southwark Works and Connect to Work more widely
- promote the pilot hub for working space in Peckham as well as similar

spaces across the borough

- report on numbers of apprenticeships by level
- define milestones for organisations supporting work experience so that their objectives align and, more particularly, to encourage businesses' developing employment opportunities for younger people with SEND

7. WORK PROGRAMME 2025-26

The Chair noted the Commission's activities over the year and thanked members for their contributions.

Meeting ended at 9:41 pm

CHAIR:

DATED:

Meeting Name:	Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission
Date:	23 July 2026
Report title:	Outcome of Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS)
Ward(s) or groups affected:	None
Classification:	Open
From:	Helen Woolgar, Deputy Director, Children's Services, Children's Social Care Yinka Olaniran Head of Quality Assurance and Workforce Development, Children's Services

RECOMMENDATION(S)

1. Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission is recommended to:
 - a) note the contents of the Ofsted report of its inspection of Southwark Children's Services from 9-13 March 2026 (Appendix 1)
 - b) note the Consolidated Post-Inspection Action Plan (Appendix 2)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. All local authority Children's Services are subject to regular inspection by Ofsted, under the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework.
3. This is a national system for evaluating how well local authorities help, protect, and care for children. It aims to be proportionate, risk-based, and focused on children's lived experiences, ensuring inspectors tailor their approach to each authority's context.
4. ILACS includes standard inspections, focused visits and Joint Targetter Area Inspections (JTAs). Together, they create a continuous cycle of evaluation and improvement, by the education and children's social care regulatory inspectorate.
5. Inspectors assess how the quality of social work practice has been sustained, and whether leaders have a strong understanding of strengths and areas for improvement. The ILACS framework assesses four core judgement areas: help and protection; children in care; care leavers; and impact of leaders and managers

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

6. The inspection took place between 9 and 13 March 2026. This was a short (one week) inspection because the previous ILACS in September 2022 had graded Southwark Council as good. The report was published on 18 May 2026.
7. The ILACS inspection found that Southwark Children's Services remains good in all judgement areas, with inspectors highlighting sustained progress, strong leadership and a clear corporate commitment to improving outcomes for children, young people and care leavers.

Key strengths

8. Strong political and corporate leadership, with children and care leavers at the centre of the Council's strategic priorities and a clear corporate parenting ethos across the organisation. Leaders were found to have an accurate understanding of service performance and a strong commitment to continuous improvement.
9. A stable, skilled and motivated workforce, supported by a positive organisational culture, effective workforce strategies and sustained investment in services. Inspectors noted that there were no social work vacancies at the time of inspection and that staff felt valued and supported.
10. Effective early help and prevention services, including the Family Hub model and strong partnership working, enabling many children and families to receive timely support before difficulties escalate.
11. Good-quality social work practice characterised by relational, systemic and trauma-informed approaches, with children and families benefiting from meaningful engagement and well-coordinated multi-agency support.
12. Strong practice in supporting children in care, with most children living in stable and nurturing homes, receiving good support for their health, education and emotional wellbeing. Social workers know children well and help them make good progress.
13. A highly effective approach to corporate parenting, with children and young people actively influencing service development through participation mechanisms including SpeakerBox and engagement with the Corporate Parenting Committee. Inspectors described the Committee as vibrant and influential.
14. Good outcomes for care leavers, who receive high-quality support from personal advisers and social workers, access to a well-regarded Care Leavers Hub, strong employment and education opportunities, and effective support with housing, health and independence. Southwark's recognition of care experience as a protected characteristic was highlighted positively.

15. Innovative and effective practice, including the parent-peer advocacy programme, embedded clinical support services and specialist responses to extra-familial harm, all of which contribute to improved outcomes and stronger engagement from families.

Areas for Development

16. While the overall findings were positive, Ofsted identified a small number of areas where further improvement is required to ensure consistently effective practice for all children and young people. The key areas for improvement are:

- Strengthening the response to children subject to police protection powers, including improving management oversight, risk assessment and senior decision-making arrangements when police protection is initiated or considered.
- Improving the response to children in care who go missing, including ensuring that return home interviews are consistently completed, that children's experiences are fully understood and that safety planning is robust and effective in reducing repeat missing episodes.
- Improving the quality and consistency of management oversight and supervision to strengthen reflective practice, professional curiosity, analysis and practice direction for frontline practitioners. Inspectors found that supervision was regular but sometimes lacked sufficient depth and challenge.

17. In addition, Ofsted identified several areas where practice could be further strengthened, including:

- Ensuring life-story work is embedded consistently for children in care.
- Improving consideration of early permanence arrangements for some very young children entering care.
- Strengthening Independent Reviewing Officer oversight between statutory reviews.
- Increasing awareness among care leavers of the full local offer available to them.
- Improving the consistency and quality of auditing and quality assurance activity.

18. The areas for improvement identified by Ofsted reflected areas already known within the service through our own quality assurance mechanisms, as noted by the Ofsted inspection report paragraph 63: *'Senior leaders have an accurate and realistic understanding of the service. Their self-assessment is thorough and candid, aligning well with the findings of Inspection.'*

19. As such improvement activities across these areas were already underway at the time of the inspection as part of our business-as-usual improvement programme and are continuing. Following the inspection these have been consolidated into the response plan Appendix 2.
20. Overall, the inspection concluded the Council delivers good services for children, young people and care leavers, with many examples of strong and innovative practice, while recognising that further work is required in a small number of areas for greater consistency and improve outcomes further.

Policy framework implications

21. The findings support the Council's commitment to ensuring that children and young people are safe, healthy, able to achieve their potential and receive the support they need at the earliest opportunity. The inspection recognised the Council's strong corporate parenting arrangements, commitment to early intervention and prevention, and investment in services for vulnerable children, young people and care leavers.
22. The inspection findings were consistent with the Council's strategic priorities at the time of inspection and provide external assurance regarding the effectiveness of services. The identified areas for improvement have already been incorporated into service improvement planning and existing quality assurance arrangements to ensure continued progress and compliance with statutory responsibilities

Community, equalities (including socio-economic) and health impacts

Community impact statement

23. The services inspected support some of the most vulnerable children, young people and families in the borough and therefore, as graded good, have a significant positive impact on the wider community. These services thus contribute to safer communities, improved family resilience and better outcomes for children and young people.
24. The report highlights positive partnership working across the council and with partner agencies, helping children remain safely within their families and communities wherever possible. Implementation of the inspection improvement actions will further strengthen support for children and families and contribute to the council's objective of reducing inequalities and improving outcomes across Southwark's diverse communities.
25. Children's Services supports children, young people and families from a wide range of backgrounds, including those with protected characteristics and those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage. The ILACS inspection found that Southwark provides good services which are responsive to children's individual circumstances and needs. Inspectors highlighted positive practice with disabled children, unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, children living in kinship arrangements and care leavers, recognising services' efforts to ensure that support reflects children's cultural, religious and individual identities.

26. The inspection also recognised the council's focus on addressing disadvantage through early help, family support, education, employment and housing initiatives. Care leavers were found to receive effective support to access education, training, employment and accommodation, helping to reduce the longer-term impacts of inequality and social disadvantage.
27. There are no specific equalities implications arising directly from noting the inspection findings. However, delivery of the improvement actions identified by Ofsted will support the council's ongoing commitment to promoting equality of opportunity and improving outcomes for all children and young people, particularly those who are most vulnerable.

Health impact statement

28. The inspection found that children in care and care leavers generally receive good support to meet their physical, emotional and mental health needs. Children benefit from regular health assessments, timely access to specialist services and trauma-informed clinical support. Inspectors highlighted the positive contribution of the Council's embedded clinical service, which works alongside social workers to improve outcomes for children, families and care leavers.
29. Care leavers were found to receive practical and emotional support to access physical and mental health services, while children in care benefit from dedicated mental health provision and coordinated multi-agency working. These arrangements help promote resilience, improve wellbeing and support positive long-term outcomes.
30. Implementation of the inspection improvement plan will further strengthen safeguarding and service quality, contributing to improved emotional wellbeing, safety and health outcomes for children and young people across Southwark.

Climate change implications

31. There are no direct climate change implications arising from this report. The inspection positively recognised the Council's focus on supporting more children to remain safely within their families, communities and local networks, together with efforts to increase local placement availability. These approaches not only improve outcomes for children through maintaining community connections but may also contribute to reducing travel demands associated with out-of-area placements and service delivery.
32. Any actions arising from the inspection will be implemented in accordance with the Council's commitment to addressing the climate emergency and achieving its carbon reduction objectives. Environmental sustainability considerations will continue to be taken into account as part of future service planning, commissioning and estate decisions where relevant.

Resource implications

33. There are no immediate financial or resource implications arising directly from this report. Any significant future resource requirements identified through the development of the post-inspection improvement plan will be considered through the Council's established budget-setting and governance processes. This approach provides assurance that the Council will continue to prioritise investment in services for vulnerable children, young people and care leavers while maintaining effective financial oversight.

Consultation

34. The findings set out in the inspection report are informed engagement with children and young people, families, care leavers, elected members, partner agencies, senior leaders, managers and frontline practitioners. Inspectors reviewed a range of casework and performance information and met with children in care, care leavers and partner organisations as part of the inspection process.
35. Children and young people's participation is a significant strength identified within the inspection. Ofsted highlighted the positive contribution of participation forums, including SpeakerBox, and recognised the influence that children in care and care-experienced young people have on service development and corporate parenting arrangements.
36. No additional consultation is required in relation to the recommendation that the Committee note the outcome of the inspection. However, the council will continue to engage with children, young people, families, carers and partner agencies as part of its ongoing commitment to service improvement and co-production.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Head of Procurement

37. Not required

Director of Law and Governance

38. Not required

Strategic Director of Resources

39. Not required

Other officers

40. Not required

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Inspecting local authority children's services - GOV.UK	Department of Education	

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Inspection of Southwark local authority
Appendix 2	Consolidated Post-Inspection Improvement Plan

AUDIT TRAIL

This section must be included in all reports.

Lead Officer	Alasdair Smith. Director of Children’s Services		
Report Author	Helen Woolgar, Deputy Director, Children’s Services, (Children’s Social Care)		
Version	Final		
Dated	15 July 2026		
Key Decision?	No		
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / EXECUTIVE MEMBER			
Officer Title		Comments Sought	Comments Included
Director of Law and Governance		No	No
Strategic Director of Resources		No	No
List other officers here			
Executive Member		Yes	No
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team			15 July 2026

Appendix 2 – Consolidated Post-Inspection Improvement Plan

Plan	Objective	Actions	Lead	By When	Impact measures
1	Strengthening the response to children subject to police protection powers, including improving management oversight, risk assessment and senior decision-making arrangements when police protection is initiated or considered.	Amend practice guidance for Review Strategy Meetings to require these are booked at the initial strategy meeting Amend practice guidance to include requirements for a review strategy meeting where safety arrangements change Practice direction to Service managers. All must complete senior manager oversight within two working days in all cases where a child is placed under PPP. Heads of Service to undertake weekly audit of Service Manager oversight of PPP, and ensure there is a clear plan of what happens next, that includes safety plans and living arrangements for the child. 6-weekly joint LA and Police meetings to be convened to review use of PPP. Heads of Service to escalate any concerns to the Police on proportionality of PPP Heads of Service to include in their SQUARE report bi-monthly their oversight of PPP across their service Power BI Dashboards to be updated to include PPP specific reporting to increase live management oversight 6-month review Quality of Practice Audit to be completed on PPP explicitly reviewing implementation of this action plan. To be presented to the Quality and Effectiveness subgroup of the Children's Safeguarding Partnership.	Policy Lead & Team Managers Policy Lead & Service Managers Heads of Service Heads of Service Head of Service Head of Service Head of Service Service Manager – Intelligence & Impact Head of Quality Assurance	Complete Complete Complete Complete Complete Complete July 2026 September 2026 & March 27	- Reduction in escalations due to inappropriate use of PPP - Audit evidence of compliance with practice standards
2	Improving the response to children in care who go missing, including ensuring that return home interviews are consistently completed, that children's experiences are fully understood and that safety planning is robust and effective in reducing repeat missing episodes.	Establish cross-service Missing Improvement Steering Group – to drive improvement increased pace and coordination of improvement activity Establish weekly Missing Panel – Chaired by Head of Service for Youth Justice Services – to review all missing children and performance against key indicators. Update and publish revised Missing from Home & Care protocol Embed 'missing risk' identifiers in statutory social care assessments Develop and publish best practice guidance for foster carers and children's homes Deliver missing and absent training to key workers, and carers 6-month qualitative analysis of the missing improvement activity, including child's voice and experience Embed missing risk mitigation and planning into Home (placement) planning meetings for all children Evaluate Return Home Interviewer effectiveness and capacity against Families First Reforms to understand opportunity and potential for resource investment	Assistant Director – Family Early Help & Youth Justice Head of Service - Youth Justice Policy Lead Heads of Service Policy Lead Principle Social Worker Head of Quality Assurance Head of Service – Care & Care Leavers Assistant Director – Transformation	Complete Complete Complete August 2026 September 2026 September 2026 September 2026 & March 27 September 2026 November 2026	- Increase in rate of return home interviews offered - Increase in rate of return home interviews accepted - Increase in rate of return home interviews completed - Increase in proportion of face-to-face return home interviews - Reduction in rate of repeat missing episodes - Reduction in rate of 'absence' episodes reported as missing - Audit evidence on improving quality of return home interviews

Appendix 2 – Consolidated Post-Inspection Improvement Plan

Plan	Objective	Actions	Lead	By When	Impact measures
3	Improving the quality and consistency of management oversight and supervision to strengthen reflective practice, professional curiosity, analysis and practice direction for frontline practitioners. Inspectors found that supervision was regular but sometimes lacked sufficient depth and challenge.	Amend Power BI Dashboards to strengthen reporting on management oversight and supervision	Service Manager – Intelligence & Impact	Complete	• Increase rate and timeliness of individual supervision • Increase rate and timeliness of group supervision • Management attendance rates at training • Audit findings evidence improving quality of supervision
		Amend service-by-service performance reporting template to strengthen monthly reporting expectations on supervision and management oversight	Head of Quality Assurance	Complete	
		Embed management supervision training into managers' induction programme	Principle Social Worker	Complete	
		Develop and deliver renewed programme of supervision and oversight training	Assistant Director – Clinical Services	June 26 – March 27	
		6-month quality review of audit of supervision and management oversight	Head of Quality Assurance	September 26 & March 27	
4	Ensuring life-story work is embedded consistently for children in care.	Embed dedicated Life Story Work Practitioner into Care Teams, and Life Story case management workflow into the Mosaic system	Head of Service – Care & Care Leavers	Complete	• Rate and timeliness of life story work • Rate of attendance at training • Audit findings evidence improving quality of life story work
		Further develop Power BI dashboards to track Life Story Work completion and timeliness	Service Manager - Intelligence & Impact	Complete	
		Develop and distribute new practice support tools and templates to support consistency in practice for Life Story Work	Service Manager – Care & Care Leavers	Complete	
		Develop and publish new Life Story Work Policy – setting out expectations and timescales, roles and responsibilities, and quality standards	Policy Lead	Complete	
		Roll out programme of development and training sessions to workforce on the above, including embedding training into induction and annual training programme.	Principle Social Worker	April 26 – March 27	
		Establish Life Story Work practice surgeries – providing ongoing support to	Life Story Work Practitioner	July 26	
		6-month Review audit of Life Story Work quality and performance	Head of Quality Assurance	September 26 March 27	
4	Improving consideration of early permanence arrangements for some very young children entering care.	Amend practice guidance to ensure permanence planning meetings are for children in pre-proceedings, any pre-birth assessment that goes to legal panel and are scheduled promptly for all children enter care.	Deputy Director – Children's Social Care	Complete	• Timeliness of recorded early permanence discussions • Rates of attendance at training • Numbers of children achieving early permanence
		Embed early permanence discussions with Adoption Service for all relevant children	Deputy Director – Children's Social Care	Complete	
		Design and deliver early permanence training for all practitioners and embed into annual training programme.	Principle Social Worker	June 26 – March 27	
		Schedule Early Permanence Annual Report to Children's Services Leadership Team	Deputy Director – Children's Social Care	February 2027	
5	Strengthening Independent Reviewing Officer oversight between statutory reviews.	Revise and communicate IRO practice standards to require regular 'midway reviews' between statutory reviews for all children in care	Head of Quality Assurance	Complete	• Rate and timeliness of midway reviews • Rate of positive feedback from children in IRO support
		Amend Power BI Reporting Dashboards to strengthen available data and reporting against midway review timeliness	Service Manager - Intelligence & Impact	Complete	
		Embed monthly midway review performance reporting to Assistant Director	Head of Quality Assurance	Complete	

Appendix 2 – Consolidated Post-Inspection Improvement Plan

Plan	Objective	Actions	Lead	By When	Impact measures
6	Increasing awareness among care leavers of the full local offer available to them	Review Bright Spots survey findings to better understand issues accessing relevant entitlements and the local offer amongst children in care and care leavers	Senior Service Development Officer	Complete	Increase in positive reporting on accessing local offer through children and young people's survey and regular review feedback
		Workshop and co-production sessions with children in care and care leavers to understand priorities and opportunities for improving local offer access – delivered as part of Corporate Parenting Strategy renewal	Senior Service Development Officer	Complete	
		Embed improving access to relevant information on rights and entitlements, including local offer, into revised corporate parenting strategy and associated delivery plan	Senior Service Development Officer	Complete	
		Review, refresh and relaunch whole local offer, including communications mechanisms	Service Manager – Care & Care Leavers	December 2026	
7	Improving the consistency and quality of auditing and quality assurance activity.	Increase the rate of internal senior manager audit moderations from 2 to 3 per audit round - to complete moderation 35-40% of each audit round	Head of Quality Assurance	Complete	- Increase in overall audit numbers - Increased number of moderated audits - Decrease in rate of moderated audits receiving a revised grading - Evidential reductions in drift and delay for children and young people through more effective oversight of practice
		Embed further best practice examples and minimum standard guidance into audit tool	Head of Quality Assurance	Complete	
		Update on timeliness of supervision post-Audit for relevant children to service-by-service performance meetings	Head of Quality Assurance	Complete	
		Update on Audit action completion rates, and impact of response to service-by-service performance meetings	Head of Quality Assurance	Complete	
		Embed rates of child & family feedback in audit into dashboard	Head of Quality Assurance	Complete	
		Embed rates of professional feedback in audit into dashboard	Head of Quality Assurance	Complete	
		Develop and deliver refresher e-learning module, supported by best practice examples for auditors to complete annually	Principle Social Worker	July 2026	
		Commission external QA provider to support a refresh of the managers audit training package, and support delivery of the training	Assistant Director – Transformation	August 2026	
		Commission external provider to support refresh of the audit elements of the management induction offer	Assistant Director – Transformation	August 2026	
		Develop and Implement a peer-to-peer moderation model across auditors to build live learning and knowledge transfer at the manager level	Head of Quality Assurance	September 2026	
		Commission external moderation from Peer Review team to provide scrutiny and challenge to audit process and findings - to complete moderation 10 - 15% of each audit round	Assistant Director – Transformation	September 2026	
		Develop and test AI moderation tool - test full system moderation for correlation with manager and external peer moderation findings	Assistant Director – Transformation / Technology and Digital Service	December 2026	
		Develop and test AI Audit quality tool - test full system quality of audit review Agent - to identify level of SMART actions in audit and use of 'content mining' to review depth and quality of audit content	Assistant Director – Transformation / Technology and Digital Service	December 2026	

Inspection of Southwark local authority children's services

Inspection dates: 9 to 13 March 2026

Lead inspector: Jenny-ellen Scotland, His Majesty's Inspector

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Good
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Good
The experiences and progress of children in care	Good
The experiences and progress of care leavers	Good
Overall effectiveness	Good

Services for children and care leavers in Southwark remain good, providing positive experiences for them and supporting their progress. Strong political and corporate commitment keeps children central to strategic priorities, supported by a stable and skilled workforce.

Practice is underpinned by relational, systemic and trauma-informed approaches that help children feel understood, supported and safer. Children and families can access a good range of early help support, statutory social work is timely and proportionate, and children in care benefit from nurturing care, good health and education support and ambitious corporate parenting. Care leavers receive purposeful, sensitive help that strengthens their independence and wellbeing. Leaders understand the service well. They have developed a robust learning culture. They work proactively to develop services and respond constructively when weaknesses are identified.

While further work is needed in some specific areas to ensure consistently effective practice for all children, the overall picture is one of sustained progress, active engagement with children and families, and a clear commitment to achieving the best possible outcomes.

What needs to improve?¹

- The response to, and management oversight for, children who are made subject to police protection (outcome 3, national framework).
- The response to children in care who go missing (outcome 3, national framework).
- The quality of management oversight and supervision of frontline practitioners to improve the quality and consistency of support for children and their families (enabler: the workforce is equipped and effective, national framework).

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

1. Children and families are benefiting from a continuously improving approach to prevention and early help, alongside an integrated family hub model that is supporting earlier identification of need and more timely support, preventing needs from escalating. Although the local authority's embedded kinship family model and its commitment to earlier intervention align with national reforms, the structural arrangements required to support this approach are still at an early stage.
2. Children and families mostly receive timely relational support from skilled early help practitioners, resulting in meaningful and sustained engagement. Child-focused assessments lead to coordinated multi-agency plans that deliver clear improvements in children's lives. Leaders are aware of the need to simplify the overly complex processes that are leading to a small number of children experiencing delays in accessing early help.
3. The interface between early help and statutory social work is managed well, so that children move appropriately between services as their needs change.
4. Referrals to the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) are timely and appropriate, strengthened by the consultation line which supports professionals to make more informed and higher-quality referrals. Experienced managers complete initial reviewing promptly and provide clear guidance, leading to well-reasoned threshold decisions that ensure that children receive the right help without delay.
5. Screening of contacts and referrals is thorough and supported by a range of identification and assessment tools, including domestic abuse, neglect and harmful sexual behaviour toolkits, alongside a strengths-based, solution-

¹ The areas for improvement have been cross-referenced with the outcomes, enablers or principles in the [Children's Social Care: National Framework](#). This statutory guidance sets out the purpose, principles for practice and expected outcomes of children's social care.

focused and relational practice approach. Screening consistently draws on family history and multi-agency information, leading to balanced and accurate threshold decisions. Safety planning is routinely considered, resulting in plans that appropriately address identified risks.

6. MASH managers provide effective oversight at key decision-making points, supporting analysis, maintaining timeliness and ensuring effective decisions.
7. When children need statutory help or protection, they are transferred promptly to assessment and intervention teams. Social workers respond effectively to escalating risk, holding timely multi-agency child protection strategy discussions and taking immediate protective action. Child protection enquiries involve clear analysis and meaningful engagement with children and families, supporting well-reasoned decisions. However, there is some variability in the quality of recording of safety and contingency plans.
8. Practitioners in the assessment and intervention teams and the safeguarding and family support teams complete detailed and analytical assessments of children's needs, drawing well on multi-agency information, producing a clear rationale for plans to support children and families. Children's views are captured consistently through direct work. Workers engage sensitively with families, including proactive engagement with fathers and wider family networks.
9. Children's plans are well informed and co-produced with parents and partner agencies. They are reviewed regularly through well-attended core groups and child in need meetings. While they are generally clear and proportionate, some plans contain too many actions or lack measurable time frames.
10. Practitioners speak about children with warmth and they have a good understanding of their developmental needs and risks. Records are clearly written. Frequent and creative direct work with children helps to build supportive relationships, although it is not always used to deepen understanding of children's lived experiences or help them to understand significant changes or the reasons for social work involvement.
11. Disabled children are supported well, with an effective response to their needs and safeguarding concerns. The 0–25 all-age service provides consistent support and helps sustain stable, trusting relationships with social workers. Practitioners know children well, advocate effectively with partner agencies and complete carer and mental capacity assessments in a timely way to inform decisions. Support to step down from child protection or child in need plans promotes independence and enables families to engage confidently with universal services.
12. Pre-proceedings processes, as part of the Public Law Outline, are well structured and monitored closely, with effective tracking that prevents drift.

Decisions to enter pre-proceedings are timely, and most letters before proceedings are completed promptly, although the quality is variable. Intensive support from the therapeutic and practical support project for children, young people and their families (SWift) enables many families to make positive changes, with a significant number successfully diverted from court. When children's circumstances do not improve, there is prompt review and then escalation to proceedings, with positive feedback from Cafcass and the district family judge on appropriate timing of court applications and high quality of social work evidence.

13. The innovative parent-peer advocate programme provides highly effective support, enabling more children's needs to be met under child in need rather than child protection plans. Through parent-to-parent peer advocacy, parents with lived experience of children's services use their knowledge to support other parents and carers receiving a service. Their emotional support, guidance in understanding processes and reports, and practical assistance at meetings are contributing to very positive outcomes, including successful de-escalation and reduced repeat child protection episodes.
14. Family group conferences are used effectively to identify strengths and support within wider family networks and to develop contingency plans when children cannot be safely cared for by their parents.
15. Work to safeguard children who experience extra-familial harm is strengthened by a specialist team that works alongside children's social workers, using mapping tools, multi-agency information and structured frameworks to understand context, peer influence and patterns of harm. This team's persistent, analytical approach strengthens safety planning and enables more children to remain at home. Social workers meet with children regularly, but they do not always use direct-work tools effectively when children find it difficult to talk about their experiences. Return home interviews are not being used consistently to understand the circumstances when children go missing, limiting the information available to inform planning.
16. When children are affected by domestic abuse, social workers recognise indicators of harm and use appropriate tools to explore impact, parental conflict and family dynamics.
17. When children are experiencing neglect, social workers differentiate well between poverty and situations of neglect. The local authority has recently updated its neglect toolkit and its impact is evident in the family early help service and the MASH, although not yet fully embedded across the wider service.
18. Practice with children living in private fostering arrangements has significantly improved since this was identified as a concern at the last inspection. Increased awareness-raising has led to earlier identification. Children receive timely visits,

thorough assessments, well-coordinated plans and effective oversight. Clinical input and panel scrutiny help to ensure tailored support and high-quality life-story work that helps children to understand their experiences.

19. Management oversight, assessment and risk analysis are not sufficiently robust when children are made subject to police powers of protection. A small number of children return to their families in the absence of timely, well-informed decisions, that lack the commensurate level of senior oversight before these arrangements end. When police protection is not deemed appropriate, escalation and strategic challenge are limited. In the light of the inspection findings, senior leaders are implementing actions to address these issues.
20. Effective relational and systemic interventions help children to remain safely with their families, reducing the need for them to come into care.
21. Children aged 16 or 17 who are at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness receive timely support, with thorough assessment and planning in response to their needs and vulnerabilities. When needed, children are accommodated under section 20. Advocacy is available, but it is not yet embedded as routine practice for all children.
22. Children who are identified as young carers receive a comprehensive and tailored offer of support that reflects their individual needs and improves their wellbeing. Young carers' voices increasingly shape service development.
23. The out-of-hours service works swiftly and effectively across the range of work to protect children and care leavers. The service's approach to custody decisions, de-escalation and information-sharing underpins positive safeguarding outcomes and continuity of planning for children.
24. The local authority designated officer service responds promptly to referrals of concerns about adults working with children, ensuring individual cases progress appropriately, and supporting partners and employers to address risk within the children's workforce. The service also provides effective support for employers by sharing information on safer recruitment and providing consultation and multi-agency training.
25. The in-house clinical service, led by a consultant psychologist, is well embedded across teams and provides consultations, direct clinical work, court-directed assessments and supports group supervision, all of which are contributing to the quality of practice and interventions for children and their families.
26. Management oversight is evident on most children's records, although it can be formulaic and lacking in depth. Although supervision is regular, limited reflection and practice direction reduce scope to strengthen practitioners' analysis and professional curiosity. Gaps are more apparent where workers and managers in the assessment and intervention teams have higher caseloads.

Clinical practitioners provide some compensatory reflective input, but this does not replace the need for greater managerial oversight.

27. Effective arrangements are in place to identify children who are missing full-time education. The local authority works positively with families and schools to address barriers to education, and partnership working ensures that risks are promptly identified and responded to. Children who are electively home educated receive a service that is supportive of both the children and parental decision-making, with provision reviewed in line with statutory guidance. Clear multi-agency systems further support the timely identification and management of risk.

The experiences and progress of children in care: good

28. Children's participation is meaningful and influential, ensuring their voices shape services and decision-making. Corporate parenting is a key priority for political and corporate leaders. Along with established relationships with social workers and committed carers, this has helped to ensure effective care for children, with timely planning, good health and education support and sensitive practice.
29. Most children enter care in a planned way when they cannot remain safely at home. The edge of care service helps children remain safely with their families, using family group conferences to identify carers early and sustain important relationships.
30. Most children in care live in stable and nurturing homes where they feel safe and happy and make good progress.
31. Brothers and sisters live together whenever possible. Family time with parents, siblings and wider family members is purposeful, well planned and focused on maintaining positive relationships.
32. Through coordinated support from social workers, clinicians and carers, alongside robust commissioning, an increasing number of children are experiencing greater placement stability and are living in or near Southwark, helping them maintain connections with their communities, schools and support networks. Children in care enjoy positive relationships with their social workers, who visit them regularly. Direct work is impactful for many children, helping them understand their identity and experiences. There are examples of strong life-story work, showing positive improvements from the previous inspection. However, life-story work is not consistently embedded, meaning early information is not always captured and some children do not receive the support required to better understand their histories. Permanence and stability for children in care are well established, supported by clear systems that track progress from entry into care. Independent reviewing officers (IROs) contribute to monitoring children's experiences beyond formal reviews. However, current arrangements mean that IROs do not review children's progress between

review meetings, which can delay the identification and resolution of emerging issues. IROs produce high-quality records that help children understand decisions both now and in the future.

33. Some young children who are in care from birth have not benefited from early permanence being considered during pre-birth assessments or before they entered care. As a result, they experience unnecessary delay in securing permanence.
34. Reunification with parents or wider family is consistently promoted, considered and reviewed throughout the child's journey, both before and during their time in care. When children return to the care of their parents or wider family after a period in care, decision-making is effective. Reunification is carefully planned and supported, with attention to practical and emotional needs, including timely parenting work, specialist input and clinical oversight. Successful reunifications following long periods in care show the impact of sustained, well-coordinated support from social workers, clinicians and providers.
35. Children who are living in kinship arrangements benefit from child-centred assessments and sensitive planning that take account of their cultural and religious identity. Placement stability is kept under close review, and where children are thriving, careful consideration is given to how they can be cared for through special guardianship orders, giving children relational permanence.
36. Disabled children in care benefit from stable, positive relationships with social workers who know them well and communicate in ways that meet their individual needs. Care planning reflects the complexity of their circumstances and clearly sets out the arrangements required to support them. They receive regular health reviews, and their day-to-day needs are well met through coordinated multi-agency support.
37. Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children receive sensitive, well-informed social work support. Children live in homes with carers who meet their cultural and religious needs. Social workers understand their complex experiences and traumatic histories and they visit children more frequently when needs and/or risks arise. Multi-agency work is well coordinated so that education, health and immigration needs are addressed promptly, and children are supported to reconnect with family members through the Red Cross.
38. Children's health needs are supported through regular health assessments and reviews. The dedicated child in care child and adolescent mental health service (Care Link) and clinical practitioners provide timely, trauma-informed therapeutic support for children and their carers, promoting greater stability and better outcomes for children.
39. Deprivation of liberty orders are used rarely, and when used are appropriate to keep children safe. There is strong oversight of their use through rigorous management monitoring and legal scrutiny that focus on children's support

needs, visiting arrangements and clear exit planning. When needed, these arrangements are having a positive impact, reducing exploitation risks and missing episodes for some children.

40. For some children in care who go missing, interventions have limited impact and repeated episodes continue. Return home interviews are not always completed, and social workers do not consistently use their relationships with children to explore with them the reasons they go missing or to undertake robust safety planning. Supervision does not routinely support sufficient curiosity or adaptation of approaches, hampering efforts to reduce risks or missing incidents.
41. Children in care are encouraged to engage in education, activities and personal development, and most achieve well. Personal education plans are of consistently high quality, capturing children's views, tracking their progress and ensuring schools are fully involved when children enter care. The virtual school provides effective oversight, responding to dips in attendance or attainment and using pupil premium funding effectively.
42. Children's carers and social workers actively encourage and celebrate children's achievements, including through twice-yearly celebration events. The council's Corporate Parenting Committee is vibrant and influential, contributing to strategic decision-making through corporate parenting arrangements and supporting the organising of a range of enjoyable activities for children. While fostering capacity remains a challenge, compounded by an ageing carer population, the fostering service is effective and clear strategies are in place to increase recruitment, including a dedicated marketing team and an improvement lead. When placements become fragile or risk disruption, foster carers receive prompt support from their placement social workers and the children's social workers, along with clinicians, through stability meetings and clear disruption planning.
43. Adoption practice is thorough, with detailed assessments and early engagement with the regional adoption agency. However, limited availability of early permanence carers may lead to delays in achieving permanence for some children.
44. Leaders recognise the need for further work with the regional adoption agency to increase adopter recruitment.

The experiences and progress of care leavers: good

45. Care leavers receive high-quality support from social workers and personal advisers (PAs), helping them to navigate independence at a pace that reflects their needs. They are a clear corporate and political priority, supported by an embedded corporate parenting ethos in which their voice is valued and actively shapes services. Care leaver status is recognised as a protected characteristic in

Southwark, with strong engagement across the council and sustained investment in service transformation.

46. The care leavers' hub has been significantly improved in line with young people's wishes and is highly valued as a safe, welcoming space. It provides easy access to support with employment, therapeutic help, housing and independent living skills, helping care leavers feel connected and part of a community.
47. Most care leavers benefit from supportive relationships with social workers and PAs who know them well and advocate effectively for them, although high PA caseloads can at times limit contact. While care leavers do not always have the opportunity to build a relationship with their PA before turning 18, flexible arrangements allow social workers to remain involved during transition for as long as needed to ensure continuity. Practitioners are proud of young people and they celebrate their achievements.
48. Care leavers feel genuinely heard and valued through their involvement in the long-established SpeakerBox group. They describe significant gains in confidence, enjoyment and pride, as well as opportunities to influence services by presenting to the Corporate Parenting Committee and training as young inspectors. SpeakerBox also helps reduce stigma, giving care leavers positive peer connections and a supportive community of other care-experienced young people.
49. The service is moving to an approach where care leavers are assumed to continue with a PA beyond the age of 21 unless they choose otherwise. This change is already improving engagement for those over 21. Care leavers know they can return for support at any time and understand how to access the service.
50. Care leavers can access the local offer through a visually engaging website available in many different languages, helping them to understand their entitlements in their first or chosen language. However, not all care leavers are aware of the local offer and the full range of support available. The offer would benefit from greater clarity for specific groups, such as young parents.
51. Pathway plans are comprehensive, co-produced with young people and written in clear language that reflects their voices, needs and aspirations. Practitioners review plans with young people regularly; however, they do not always update them after significant changes in circumstances. Managers provide consistent oversight and their comments to young people are personal and celebratory.
52. Care leavers receive practical and emotional support to access physical and mental health services, including bespoke mental wellbeing provision. Their pathway plans clearly outline their health needs, and recent improvements now enable them to access their health histories, helping them understand their past, present and future health needs. Clinical practitioners contribute to

planning and group supervision, working alongside PAs and managers and strengthening the quality and impact of support available to care leavers.

53. Most care leavers are provided with safe accommodation and supported to develop independence skills through semi-supported living and key-worker assistance. They receive priority status for local authority housing, with work underway to extend the types of accommodation available to them.
54. Care leavers in custody receive regular visits from their PAs and appropriate financial support. PAs help them access mental health and other services while in prison. Joint planning with the probation service supports release arrangements, which include financial help and support with housing, to aid reintegration and reduce the risk of reoffending.
55. Care leavers who are parents receive good-quality support from their PAs, helping them build their parenting confidence while also meeting their own needs. When their young person's child is involved with children's social care, PAs work closely with the child's social worker to provide consistent, coordinated support.
56. Care leavers who are former unaccompanied asylum-seeking children receive good support, including emotional and mental health help from practitioners who recognise the trauma associated with their journeys to the UK. They are supported with their asylum applications and enabled to integrate into the local community, benefiting from Southwark's commitment to being a borough of sanctuary.
57. When care leavers experience increasing risks to themselves or others, they are supported through a coordinated multi-agency response involving, where appropriate, the specialist extra-familial harm team and clinical practitioners working alongside their PAs. Safety plans are co-produced with the young person so that their insight into what will work for them strengthens the relevance and effectiveness of the plan.
58. Care leavers are supported well to engage in education, employment or training. A wide range of schemes help them build functional and employability skills, including a co-designed employment pathway that has created many new opportunities across the borough with both council services and external employers, alongside ongoing work to secure ring-fenced apprenticeships. The local authority's efforts to raise awareness of care leavers among local businesses have led to employer workshops, independent learning sessions and strengthened partnerships that build young people's confidence and skills. Care leavers are encouraged in their ambitions. Those in higher education receive practical, emotional and financial support to succeed.

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

59. Stable, effective leadership of children's services and across the wider council has been a source of strength, underpinning successful frontline services. Demonstrating ambition and commitment to children and young people, senior leaders have worked persistently to create a skilled, motivated workforce and to foster a culture of collaboration, empathy and high aspiration. Determined corporate and political support, along with sustained investment, continues to strengthen services for children and families.
60. Leaders understand when improvements are needed in specific areas and they take effective action to develop services and achieve better experiences and outcomes for children. The development of the parent-peer advocacy service has strengthened families' engagement and confidence during child protection processes. The continued embedding of clinical services is improving the quality and consistency of practice, with clinically informed group supervision deepening reflection and professional curiosity. Clinical practitioners and social workers together provide purposeful support to parents and carers, helping to stabilise care arrangements and reduce the likelihood of disruption.
61. Good progress has been made in many key areas since the last inspection, including the response to privately fostered children, contingency planning for children, fostering and placement sufficiency. The specialist extra-familial harm team responds swiftly and adaptably to emerging risks, strengthening children's safety in the community. However, the effectiveness of this work is weakened by inconsistency in completing return home interviews for children who go missing from home and care. Children in care benefit from more stable placements, supported by meaningful social worker relationships and clinical input. Timely and high-quality intervention in pre-proceedings and care proceedings is improving outcomes for vulnerable children. However, further work is needed to strengthen responses for children who go missing, including the consistent use of return home interviews, and to embed good-quality life-story work across the service. Both these areas were identified as issues at the last inspection.
62. Political and corporate leaders are highly visible and ambitious for children and care leavers. Political leaders demonstrate robust commitment, bringing energy, insight and purposeful engagement to their roles. The chief executive advocates authentically for children and families, ensuring the council's corporate strategy places children at its centre and maintains a clear, sustained focus on positive outcomes. The DCS and senior leadership team provide confident, strategic leadership. They are clearly motivated to meet the needs of children, families and care leavers and maintain a determined focus on getting it right for them.
63. Senior leaders have an accurate and realistic understanding of the service. Their self-assessment is thorough and candid, aligning well with the findings of

this inspection. Leaders responded promptly and transparently during the inspection when weaknesses in the response to children subject to police powers of protection were identified. This demonstrates a mature leadership approach that recognises shortfalls and takes timely action to strengthen practice and safeguard children.

64. Leaders have a firm commitment to their role as corporate parents. There is a clear, shared sense of collective responsibility across the council and partner agencies for children in care and care leavers, with a consistent ethos that 'these are our children'. The corporate parenting strategy is aspirational and ambitious, reflecting a clear understanding of the lived experiences of children in care and care-experienced young people. Children's participation is a significant strength in Southwark, with children's voices firmly at the heart of practice.
65. The sufficiency strategy is supported by a clear and comprehensive action plan. Leaders prioritise care for children close to home, including proactive work to return children in care and care leavers to Southwark when they have been placed further afield. The council's newly opened children's home, graded outstanding at its first inspection, is being followed with plans for a second home later this year, increasing opportunities for children to remain within their local community and networks. Shared resources from the new home, including trauma-informed therapists working across both the home and the children in care service, further strengthen support for children. The local authority's commitment to supporting children to remain with their birth parents or wider family networks results in more children living in kinship arrangements and not requiring foster or residential care.
66. The performance framework is underpinned by intelligence-led use of performance data, alongside audits dip sampling and seeking feedback from children, care leavers and parents/carers. While the audit tool is well designed, its application is inconsistent, leading to an overly positive view and limiting leaders' ability to identify gaps in aspects of practice that cannot be seen through performance data. Leaders have responded appropriately with a clear action plan to strengthen audit quality, consistency and oversight.
67. Leaders are committed to continuous improvement and have established a robust learning culture. Practitioners have ready access to relevant training through the comprehensive LearningFest programme. This aligns well with the local authority's practice model, ensuring children and care leavers benefit from informed practitioners who have the skills to help and support them.
68. The quality of supervision is inconsistent. While group supervision is a significant strength, one-to-one supervision does not consistently support reflective thinking, promote professional curiosity or provide the practice guidance practitioners need to further enhance the quality and consistency of help and support for children and care leavers.

69. Leaders create a supportive, caring and safe environment in which practitioners can flourish. Their sustained focus on strengthening and stabilising the workforce has resulted in there being no social worker vacancies. Practitioners report that they love working in Southwark and feel supported and empowered to do their best for children and care leavers.

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Meeting Name:	Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission
Date:	23 July 2026
Report title:	Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission Work Programme 2026-2027
Ward(s) or groups affected:	N/a
Classification:	Open
Reason for lateness (if applicable):	No
From:	Head of Scrutiny

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the Education and Local Economy Scrutiny Commission consider potential scrutiny topics for inclusion in the commission work programme for the 2026-27 municipal year.
2. That the commission defer agreement of the work programme until the next meeting in October 2026 for the reasons set out in paragraphs 4 to 7 of the report.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3. The general terms of reference of the scrutiny commissions are set out in the council's constitution (overview and scrutiny procedure rules - paragraph 5). The constitution states that:

Within their terms of reference, all scrutiny committees/commissions will:

- a) review and scrutinise decisions made or actions taken in connection with the discharge of any of the council's functions
- b) review and scrutinise the decisions made by and performance of the executive and council officers both in relation to individual decisions and over time in areas covered by its terms of reference
- c) review and scrutinise the performance of the council in relation to its policy objectives, performance targets and/or particular service areas
- d) question members of the executive and officers about their decisions and performance, whether generally in comparison with service plans and targets over a period of time, or in relation to particular decisions, initiatives

or projects and about their views on issues and proposals affecting the area

- e) assist council assembly and the executive in the development of its budget and policy framework by in-depth analysis of policy issues
- f) make reports and recommendations to the executive and or council assembly arising from the outcome of the scrutiny process
- g) consider any matter affecting the area or its inhabitants
- h) liaise with other external organisations operating in the area, whether national, regional or local, to ensure that the interests of local people are enhanced by collaborative working
- i) review and scrutinise the performance of other public bodies in the area and invite reports from them by requesting them to address the scrutiny committee and local people about their activities and performance
- j) conduct research and consultation on the analysis of policy issues and possible options
- k) question and gather evidence from any other person (with their consent)
- l) consider and implement mechanisms to encourage and enhance community participation in the scrutiny process and in the development of policy options
- m) conclude inquiries promptly and normally within six months

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

- 4. The overview and scrutiny committee has overall responsibility for agreeing the annual work programme for OSC and the commissions, and will either agree the work programmes or delegate agreement of the commission work programmes to the respective commissions.
- 5. In developing the work programmes the overview and scrutiny committee has been recommended to focus on key issues where scrutiny can make a significant impact for local people, and issues aligned to the council's strategic priorities, with input from executive members and senior officers on current council priorities, along with matters suggested by councillors in general and the public on potential topics for scrutiny.
- 6. Given the new administration, change in leadership and potential revision of the council's strategic priorities, along with the significant number of new councillors who are in the process of familiarising themselves with their councillor role and local ward, it is considered too early in the administration term to gather information for the committee and commission to make informed choices on agreeing meaningful work programmes.

7. It is therefore recommended that the OSC and the commissions use the period between now and the October scrutiny meetings lead by the scrutiny chairs to undertake information gathering exercises including meetings with executive members and senior officers in order to identify a list of potential topics for prioritisation and agreement by overview and scrutiny committee and the commissions.
8. The commission has within its remit the executive portfolio elements listed below:

Education and Care (Councillor Rebecca Corn)

Portfolio

- **early years and childcare** – including children and family centres, early years education, childminders and nurseries
- **schools** – including school standards, places and admissions; special education needs; free healthy school and nursery meals and fruit; healthy schools and Southwark's Let's Go Zero schools network
- **special educational needs & disabilities (SEND)** – including service provision and reform
- **further, higher and adult education** – including English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), adult literacy and numeracy; and scholarships
- **children's social care** – including children in care and care leavers, fostering and adoption, support for children with disabilities and their families; and child safeguarding
- **children's mental health** – including mental wellbeing support in schools; the council's Nest open access mental health service for children and families; and improving access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health services
- **family support** – including parenting programs, the council's sure-start for teenagers service and support for families who are providing unpaid care for a child with a disability or health condition, including respite care

Inclusive Economy, Equalities and Democracy

(Councillor Rachel Bentley)

Portfolio

- **increasing employment** – support to find a job or start a new carer; careers advice and work experience; paid internships; supporting young people into employment, education and training
- **vocational skills** – including apprenticeships, vocational training and skills centres
- **businesses support** – for local businesses, cooperatives, social enterprises and entrepreneurs; increasing procurement from local businesses; and relationships with local business groups and Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)
- **high streets** – including town centre action plans, Thriving Highstreets Fund, markets
- **living wage** – promoting the London Living Wage employers

- **workers' rights** – promoting good employment practices and equality and diversity at work and trade union membership
- **Youth Parliament** - increasing the voice and influence of young people through the Southwark Youth Parliament and will act as a champion for young people in our borough

Community Safety and Engagement (Councillor David Watson)

Portfolio

- Management of youth services, and the Positive Futures Fund
9. The work programme is a standing item on the Housing Scrutiny Commission agenda and enables the Commission to consider, monitor and plan issues for consideration at each meeting.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Council Constitution • Section 3.3 – Executive Portfolios • Section 9 - Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules	Southwark Council Website	Everton Roberts 020 7525 7221
Link: Council Constitution		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
None	

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Everton Roberts, Head of Scrutiny		
Report Author	Everton Roberts, Head of Scrutiny		
Version	Final		
Dated	15 July 2026		
Key Decision?	No		
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / EXECUTIVE MEMBER			
Officer Title		Comments Sought	Comments Included
Director of Law and Governance		No	No
Strategic Director of Resources		No	No
Executive Member		No	No
Date final report sent to Scrutiny Team			15 July 2026

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2026-27

NOTE: Original held by Scrutiny Team; all amendments/queries to Amit Alva Tel: 020 7525 0496

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Councillor Callum Fowler			
Councillor Tori Griffiths			
Councillor Felicia Johnston			
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Councillor Ryan Cox			
Councillor Selena Gray			
Councillor Richard Leeming			
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Councillor Jen Thornton			
		Dated: July 2026	