

City of London

Childcare Sufficiency Assessment Service: July 2022 Update

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Key Conclusions and Recommendations

A) **Conclusion:** It is evident that occupancy levels for the first part of 2022 have been returning to levels that were observed pre-pandemic, and that the City of London's private sector early years childcare providers are experiencing an uplift in the buoyancy of their take-up and (in the majority of cases) their waiting lists. This has been accompanied by an increase of foot fall within the City of London – however it is evident that the incidence of working from home, including among workers that may have previously been customers at City of London early years childcare settings/providers, is possibly maintaining 'a level' which will affect occupancy on an ongoing basis.

Recommendation: The City of London should continue its systematic monitoring of occupancy levels – with a focus on how its private sector providers are continuing to see a gradual return to pre-COVID levels.

B) **Conclusion:** City of London childcare providers continue to highlight *their* (collective) observation of an increased number of pre-school (aged) children showing speech, language and communication needs – however, aligned to this, the number of parents/carers having an awareness of the City of London's programme remains relatively low.

Recommendation: In summer 2022, the City of London has reenergised the promotion of the COLTALE programme - and its role should be systematically disseminated through all education, social and health themed partners, so as to ensure that parents, carers and professionals have an enhanced awareness of its existence.

C) Conclusion: The majority of the early years childcare providers/setting stated that in summer 2022 recruitment and retention had been an issue or challenge for them. This included the four private day nurseries that operate in the City of London. Retention was an issue that was aligned to the (relatively low) pay in the early years and childcare sector, and a number of recent examples of professionals leaving to work in better paid occupations were cited by City of London-based nursery managers and proprietors. Another theme had been that a number of staff members who were from other (especially) Eastern and Western European countries had opted to return to their county of origin post-Brexit.

Recommendation: This is a national UK-wide challenge. The City of London should continue to signal to its early years and childcare sector that it will advise them with the issues of recruitment and retention including through promotion of national campaigns such as PACEY's #ChangedALife campaign ¹ and will help them, as much as possible, if individual staff members require advice or support.

It can also be noted that recruitment and retention issue has been discussed at the pan-London Heads of Early Years Meetings and the subject is being consistently monitored and (solutions are being) considered by the DfE.

¹ See: https://www.pacey.org.uk/news-and-views/pacey-media-centre/changedalife-campaign/

D) Conclusion: There was discernible support among early years and childcare providers *and* parents/carers for a broadening of the City Children Centre Services, for City residents, across the City local area to deliver the 'hub & spoke' model– in particular services such as drop-in type family activities and access to speech and language therapy.

Recommendation: The City of London should now intensify its exploratory conversations with relevant Private, Voluntary, Independent sector partners to exact the viability of broadening the reach of the City Children's Centre Services to deliver a hub and spoke model (which has been under consideration since 2019) – which involves a firmer foundation and presence of the resource in the North and West of the City of London locality.

- E) **Conclusion:** The three types of formal (registered) childcare that were being accessed by City of London parents with the highest frequency in spring 2022 were (in order of frequency):
 - 1. After school club
 - 2. Day nursery
 - 3. Breakfast club

Recommendation: The City of London should continue to have an awareness that an after school club remains the most frequent type of childcare that local parents are evidently accessing – and (a) continue to monitor take up at The Aldgate School playcentre and; (b) continue to ensure that the youth service offer recognises this associated demand.

F) **Conclusion:** A repeated type of feedback on the theme of occupancy reiterated by the City of London's early years childcare sector, was that some parents were continuing to seek flexibility around *when* they accessed a nursery.

Recommendation: The City of London, via its ongoing systematic monitoring of occupancy levels within its family of early years childcare providers, will continue to attain intelligence on the supply/demand of types of places which parents are requesting and/or taking up, including weekdays where demand is peaking.

Introduction

The City of London Education and Early Years' Service (EEYS) continues to ensure that every child living or educated in the City of London has the opportunity to achieve their maximum potential and thrive in their unique community.

To this effect, and aligned to a context of the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic inherently presented to the national and inner-City London early years and childcare sector during 2020 and 2021: in autumn 2021, the City of London commissioned a two-year service whereby up to mid-2023, the ongoing sufficiency of childcare provision in the locality would be monitored and subject to evolving strategic recommendations.

The service would, as relevant, on that ongoing basis:

- Assess the existing childcare provision in the City of London, mapping supply and demand and gaps (as they evolved) in the childcare market as well as monitoring any legacy impact of the COVID-19 pandemic
- Review and summarize evolving demographic data including child population projections by age group
- Undertake periodic surveys and interviews of local parents and carers
- Monitor prevailing vacancies/occupancy being experienced by the City of London's childcare providers
- Assess the ongoing awareness of the City of London Accessibility scheme
- Monitor the impact of the City of London Family Information Service regarding access to and sharing of relevant early years and childcare-themed information
- Monitor the ongoing reach, accessibility and use of the City of London Coltale programme by local families.

The Service's work therefore informed this report at the mid-point of July 2022...

2022 January – June: Childcare Sufficiency Assessment Research Methodology

This Childcare Sufficiency update report has been researched and produced via:

- 1. Analysis of up-to-date demographic population forecast data pending the release of the full ONS Census 2021 data
- 2. Analysis of outcomes of structured interviews with the early years childcare providers/settings situated in the City of London, that took place in early summer 2022
- 3. Analysis of the outcomes of an online survey which was promoted to City of London-resident parents and carers in March May 2022 and which focused on the theme of early years and childcare needs

1 Key updated demographic context

Demography remains a critical factor with regard to the sufficiency of localised childcare – from a demand and need perspective.

This City of London childcare sufficiency update for summer 2022 updates key demographic data, pending the finalised publication of the comprehensive national 2021 census figures by the Office of National Statistics...

1.1 Table 1 indicates the estimated population of 0-18 year olds within each of the City of London's wards as published by the Office of National Statistics in September 2021 – pending the release of the 2021 ONS national census in late summer 2022 – figures which will be included in the next (subsequent to this version) City of London Sufficiency report in late 2022.

<u>(ONS 2021)</u>								
Ward	All	0-2	3-4	5-7	8-11	12-14	15-18	Total
	ages	years	years	years	years	years	years	0-18
								years
Aldersgate	2,601	61	57	90	131	57	31	427
Bishopsgate	360	6	6	2	10	3	14	41
Cripplegate	2,726	81	63	77	110	102	95	528
Farringdon Within	496	6	3	18	41	24	34	126
Farringdon Without	1,742	47	26	13	30	28	52	196
Portsoken	2,181	41	38	146	136	45	89	495
Queenhithe	467	9	12	29	3	3	12	68
Tower	365	11	7	6	1	6	4	35

Table 1 – Resident population of 0-18 year olds in the City of London

Table 1 indicates that the ward which has the highest number of resident 0-18 years remains the Cripplegate ward (which incorporates the Barbican estate), followed in frequency by the Portsoken ward (which incorporates the Mansell Street estate and the Middlesex Street).

1.2 The most recent national ONS birth rate data indicates *that pre-COVID-19*, the following number of live births were recorded in the City of London's eight wards.

Table 2 – Live births in the City of London in 2019

Ward	Live births in 2019
Aldersgate	23
Bishopsgate	3
Cripplegate	23
Farringdon Within	1
Farringdon Without	17
Portsoken	6
Queenhithe	2
Tower	3

1.3 <u>Table 3</u> shows inflow migration and outflow migration aligned to the City of London locality for the period 2018-2020. The Table indicates that inflow, in particular international inflow was higher than outflow of people. Previous years had shown an identical incidence and the proportion of inflow in comparison to outflow had been increasing year-to-year. Source: ONS 2021

	Mid 2018 – Mid 2020				
City of London	Mid-2019	Long-term International		Internal Migration	
	Рор	Migration		(within ŪK)	
	Estimate =	Inflow	Outflow	Inflow	Outflow
	9,721	1,232	388	1,116	977
	Mid-2020	Long-term International Migration		Internal Migration	
	Рор			ration (within UK)	
	Estimate =	Inflow	Outflow	Inflow	Outflow
10,938	1,433	192	879	915	

- 1.4 Finally as an initial recap of key demographics for the City of London locality, it can be noted that various sources of research are indicating that City workers are still only gradually returning to their offices. For example, in June 2022 Bloomberg UK published research² which concluded that (only) *"about 60% to 70% of City employees are back at their desks…less than the 75% commuting prior to the omicron wave taking hold in late 2021"*. The research also concluded that *"businesses pushing for a return to the office continue to meet resistance from employees enjoying a better work-life balance as a result of not having to travel in every day"*. Other research has called this a 'working from home revolution'. In June 2022, King's College Published also promoted its research which reported that:³
 - Six in 10 London workers say they are now hybrid working, as defined by working from home at least one day a week and from their workplace fewer than five days a week.
 - Of those in work at the time, 37% said they worked from home at least one day a week on average before the pandemic. Double this proportion – 75% – report doing so in the past four weeks.
 - Three-quarters of London workers think we're *never* returning to the previous way of working where most people come into their workplace five or more days a week

Such findings continue to be critical with regard to the sustainability of the City of London's private sector childcare providers – and their latest views and feedback on this theme are summarised in the following section...

² https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-06-11/city-of-london-offices-still-not-as-busy-as-before-omicron

³ https://www.kcl.ac.uk/policy-institute/assets/wfh-revolution-how-new-ways-of-working-are-changing-london.pdf

2 Feedback from City of London Early Years Childcare Providers

The narrative below summarises feedback, aligned to specific themes, received (as an outcome of structured interviews undertaken through telephone or virtual/web e-interviews) from representatives of seven of the City's eight early years childcare providers during the period April – May 2022.

2.1 Occupancy and business confidence in the first half of 2022

2.1.1 In terms of the fundamental subject of occupancy, representatives of the settings interviewed reported that attendance was buoyant and returning to pre-COVID-19 levels, though not - in the case of the private sector representatives - having returned to those 2019 levels, as yet.

Two representatives outlined their anecdotal opinion that there had been incidence of families deciding to move out of their (City of London located) estate and away from London.

The representatives of the City of London's private sector settings, i.e., Bright Horizons City Child, Smithfield House Nursery, Hatching Dragons Nursery and Newpark Childcare Centre (Barbican Nursery) each outlined their opinion that City of London worker/employee foot fall was starting to *"steadily"* increase, including as increasing numbers of such individuals commuting in to the City and arriving at Farringdon, Liverpool Street and Cannon Street railway stations.

One setting summarised the experience of others when feeding back that *"our occupancy has really gone up* [to 93% at this time] *since November last year".*

Another stated that "we have 60 children on roll at the moment and quite a few starts for September... the situation is much more positive than it was".

Essentially, there was optimism returning with regard to the essential theme of (enquiries – including through 'walk ins' – leading to increasing) occupancy – for example, aligned to feedback from one representative who stated how:

"The situation is looking more optimistic and we have had a greater interest from parents to send their children to nursery than at any other time over the past 18 months...". However, the same representative echoed views of two other interviewees when stating "we have to be aware though that [City employees] working from home is still a factor".

Encouragingly, another private sector representative stated that *"we have recently had eight 'show arounds' in just one week".*

A final repeated type of feedback on the theme of occupancy was that three representatives reiterated that some parents were continuing to seek flexibility around *when* they accessed a nursery – with Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday being the most requested days, aligned, it was thought by representatives, to such parents working mid-week and having extended time at home on Mondays – Fridays (though still working on those two weekdays, however, working from home and caring for a child simultaneously at home).

2.1.2 Six of the seven representatives interviewed stated that their setting currently had a waiting list, post Easter 2022. Three representatives reported that they were particularly experiencing enquires about places for 2 year olds – including two of the City of London's private sector nurseries, with one such representative stating:

"This kind of does indicate a baby boom during lockdown... we are certainly seeing enquiries for this age group".

Another representative stated:

"Our two year olds room is our busiest room".

Two representatives of nurseries also reported (words to the effect) *"our baby room is also much busier than it has been for a while".*

It was noted however, that one of the private sector settings did not evidently have a waiting list at the time of their interview in May 2022. In contrast, one private sector setting had 40 names on a waiting list, including aligned to children ready to start attending in September 2022.

- 2.1.3 Each representative was invited to rate their business confidence in early summer 2022. Two representatives stating a rating of *very confident* and five stated *quite confident*.
- 2.1.4 As with the childcare sufficiency research that was undertaken in winter 2022, a number of the representatives highlighted a belief and a tangible incidence that the number of children experiencing speech, language and communication difficulties had been increased by the advent of COVID-19.

Two such interviewees passed on their opinion that local primary schools (including The Aldgate School) should continue to be aware that a higher number of pupils than pre-pandemic would, in all likelihood, join local Reception classes with such need(s). One of these interviewees believed that up to a third of their setting's current cohort of 3-4 pupils were evidencing (both diagnosed and undiagnosed) speech, language and communication difficulties.

2.2 Feedback on recruitment and retention

- 2.2.1 In December 2021, the Early Years Alliance published its <u>Breaking Point report</u> which surveyed just under 1,400 people in the early years childcare sector. The report made a number of conclusions, the majority of which had relevance for the City of London during the immediate post COVID-19 period:
 - 84% of responding settings were finding it difficult to recruit suitable new early years staff, with 60% finding it 'very difficult'. The reasons mostly commonly cited by these respondents were:
 - A lack of applicants for roles (87%)
 - Applicants lacking full and relevant Early Years qualifications (70%)
 - An inability to meet the salary demands of applicants (52%)
 - 62% of respondents said they were aware of staff who had left their setting in the past six months and had left the early years sector completely
 - 49% of respondents said they had to use bank or agency staff over the previous six months
 - 21% of respondents had to reduce or otherwise restrict opening hours as a result of lack of adequate staff over the previous six months
 - 49% of respondents had to limit or stop taking on new children due to a lack of sufficient staff over the previous six months
 - 61% of respondents who had experienced staffing shortages over the previous six months said that it had a negative impact on quality
 - 46% of respondents felt pessimistic about having sufficient staff in 12 months' time.
 - 34% of respondents thought that it's likely that a lack of adequate staff will result in their setting or rooms in their setting being forced to close temporarily over the next 12 months
 - 16% of respondents thought that it's likely that a lack of adequate staff will result in their setting being forced to close permanently over the next 12 months
 - The most commonly cited reasons for staff leaving the workforce were: feeling undervalued by the government (77%), job-related stress (72%) and poor pay (57%)

Additionally, in May 2022, the National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA) reported how nurseries across the UK were being forced to close or reduce their services "at an alarming rate because they are struggling to recruit and retain staff". The organisation also reported how "some smaller nurseries have had to reduce their opening hours and a lot of really experienced practitioners are leaving the profession".

2.2.2 Five of the seven representatives interviewed stated that recruitment and retention had been an issue or challenge for them too, in 2022. This included the four private day nurseries that operate in the City of London.

Direct feedback included:

"We are losing staff on a regular basis... recruitment is simultaneously proving to be hard work as well, including with candidates not showing up^4 or not interviewing well".

"It has been hard to find people... we had one candidate who sent her son to be interviewed instead of herself ... ".

"When COVID-19 started to decrease, that is when we saw some staff leave... some people left because of the money – they saw that they can earn more elsewhere".

"We are having problems finding gualified staff... even though our company tends to offer 'better wages' and holidays packages ... ".

"We see problems too when staff are off [work] sick... it is making maintaining our ratios very hard".

"As a nursery we are racking up huge agency [staff] fees... like others we are really struggling to find qualified staff on a permanent basis... I think staff are starting to discover they can earn more money for a lot less responsibility".

One interview termed the challenges with retention as being related to the "psychology of the pandemic" and how the COVID-19 pandemic had "jolted" the sectors workforce into realising how the responsibility of their role – and the stresses that accompanied it – did not see any recognition aligned to what they tended to earn in the sector.

2.3 Family Support Type Services

Each setting representative was invited to state whether they personally believed that the City would benefit from family support type services at its Northern and Western geographic location, in order to supplement the traditional (outreach) role and delivery undertaken by City Child and Family Centre.

There was clear support – among such interviewees – for broadening of the City Children's Centre services offer to a hub and spoke model, with two settings expressing an interest in hosting any extended early years and childcare/best start-type offer:

"I know that some Barbican parents would like it if someone again, like my setting, decided to run a parent and toddler group around that area, which would be additional to the group run at Barbican library".

"My setting [in the western vicinity of the City of London] would be interested in potentially hosting a parent and toddler group or parents drop-in as a part of an extended service".

"There could be an increased emphasis on out of school childcare in the north of the City".

⁴ In June 2022, the publication Nursery World reported this as a growing concern and problem: https://www.daynurseries.co.uk/news/article.cfm/id/1673152/Nurseries-say-job-applicants

3 Feedback from City of London online web survey with parents and carers

The narrative below summarises feedback received from almost 100 parents and carers in response to an online survey which was promoted by the City of London in spring 2022, via channels including its Family Information Service, The Aldgate School and the locality's early years childcare settings.

The online survey was additionally promoted via informal channels, including the Barbican parent's WhatsApp group and local Facebook pages.

3.1 The analysis narrative that follows focuses on the responses of parents/carers who evidently were resident within the City of London.

The average age of the children that were being cared for and raised by responding parents/carers was evidently 5 ¹/₄ years of age, with the most frequent age group being 0-12 months.

The average number of children that each responding carer/parent had was 1.68 - in comparison to the national English average of 1.7.

- 3.2 14% of responding parents/carers stated that they had at least one child aged 0-18 years who had SEND within their family with the most frequent type of SEND being speech language and communication needs, followed in frequency by autism spectrum conditions.
- 3.3 In terms of the fundamental usage of childcare:

19% of responding parents/carers stated they were accessing formal (registered with Ofsted) childcare *only*.

19% of responding parents/carers also stated they were accessing informal (not registered with Ofsted) childcare *only* – for example, family (including themselves), friends, neighbours, a nanny or an au-pair.

52% of responding parents/carers stated they were accessing a combination of formal and informal childcare only.

(10% of online respondents chose not to specify).

25% of responding parents stated that as of spring 2022, they were working – (however) from home.

Table 4 (overleaf) indicates the frequency with which all relevant responding parents/carers stated that they were currently accessing a type of formal or informal childcare – in late spring/early summer 2022.

Table 4 - Frequency with which responding parents/carers stated that they used specific types of childcare during term-times

Type of childcare registered or non-registered childcare	Percentage of relevant responding parents/carers
Day nursery – full or part-time	23%
Pre-School or playgroup i.e. sessional childcare	6%
Nursery Class in a state school	4%
Nursery class in an independent school	8%
Registered Childminder	6%
After School Club	31%
Holiday Playscheme	4%
Breakfast Club	21%
Nanny or Au-pair	15%
Grandparents	8%
Other family members	4%
Friends	6%

Table 3 indicates that the three types of formal (registered) childcare that were being accessed by City of London parents with the highest frequency in spring 2022 were (in order of frequency):

- 1. After school club
- 2. Day nursery
- 3. Breakfast club

It can be noted that 10% of responding parents/carers stated that the out of school childcare that they were accessing was located outside of the City of London – most frequently in the London Borough of Islington, followed in frequency by the London Borough of Hackney.

3.5 10% of parents who had a three and/or four year old stated that they were currently accessing the universal 15 hours free entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds (with 40% stating that they were buying additional hours, most frequently at the same setting),

and:

0 of (working) parents who had a three and/or four year old stated that they were currently accessing the 30 hours childcare offer for 3 and 4 year olds, though this may have been affected by their income.

3.6 Qualitative feedback about the universal 15 hours free entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds included:

"It is very good for me, but more hours at 3 years would be much more helpful".

"The cut off times are unfair in my opinion. Families should be able to sign up whenever their child enters childcare".

Qualitative feedback about the 30 hours childcare offer for 3 and 4 year olds included:

"I would use this, if it was 40 hours".

"I am a parent with a three year old and I don't know anything about this" – and similarly:

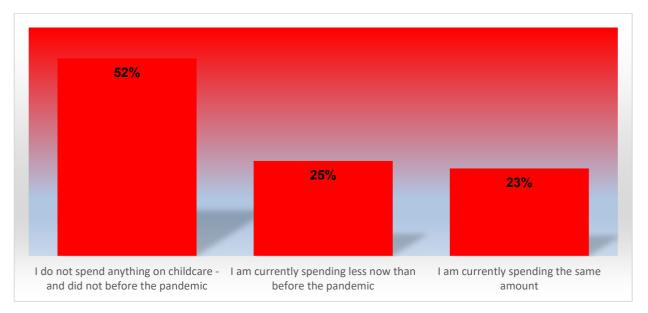
"I don't know enough about 30 hours childcare".

"I wish I knew if 30 hours is available to me?

3.7 Parents and carers were invited to provide feedback on the theme of paid (for) childcare.

Those relevant parents who were paying for some form of childcare stated whether this was is any different from how much they were spending before the COVID-19 pandemic:

<u>Diagram 1 – Proportions of parents/carers stating whether they were spending more or less on</u> <u>childcare than before the COVID-19 pandemic</u>



3.8 Parents and carers also were invited to state whether they were aware of the existence of the City of London Childcare Affordability Scheme ⁵.

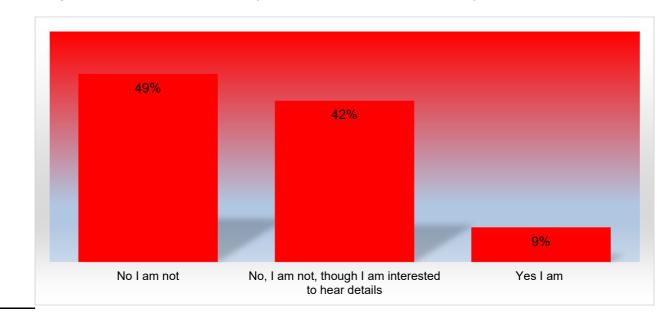


Diagram 2 – Awareness of the City of London Childcare Affordability

⁵ The Childcare Affordability Scheme helps parents living in the City of London meet the costs.

3.9 All parents/carers were invited to state whether they had currently, or whether they had at some point in the past encountered any barriers to childcare.

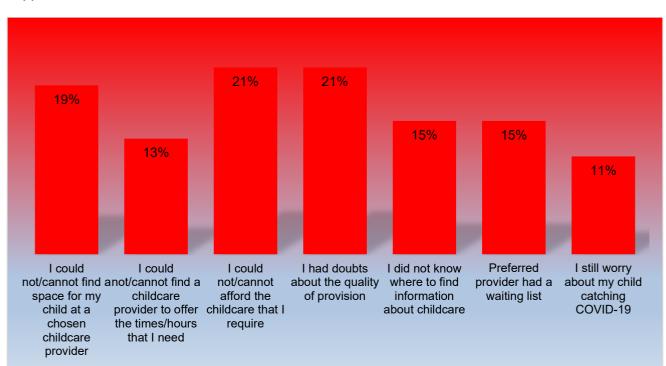


Diagram 3 - Incidence of reasons stated as to why a parent/carer was not accessing/receiving support with childcare

Diagram 3 indicates that the most frequent barrier that had been experienced by a responding City of London-resident parent/carer at some point was I could not afford the childcare that I require, followed in frequency by: I have had doubts about the quality of formal childcare provision.

Additionally to the information presented in the Table/Diagram – (only) 5% of responding parent/carers stated that: I do not use formal childcare as much as I did before the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.10 All responding parents/carers were invited to respond to the question:

What in your opinion should the City of London be doing - or continue to do - in terms of supporting parents and carers in 2022, in direct relation to childcare?

The most frequent type of feedback was (words to the effect): "They should be helping to ensure more childcare options during the school holidays".

Specific feedback on this theme included:

"There really should be clubs to cover the long school holidays, like the scheme run by Society Links".

"Could they help to provide more affordable options, especially during the holiday breaks".

The second most frequent type of feedback focused on the theme of affordability:

"I think the City, like all local authorities, should aim to help subsidise childcare in the difficult period between 1 and 3 years when it is financially very hard to work and pay for childcare or you have to give up work and only do informal childcare".

"I am going to quit my current job as: a) I cannot afford childcare and; b) I cannot find cover for early

mornings (I need to be at work by 8am)".

"There really has to be more state funding for childcare, as it is prohibitively expensive and driving people - mainly women - out of the workforce. Instead of a new HQ for Morgan Stanley on the Museum of London site there should be a new state school (primary and secondary) with a nursery!".

3.11 Responding parents and carers were requested to say whether they were aware of the existence of the City of London Family Information Service:

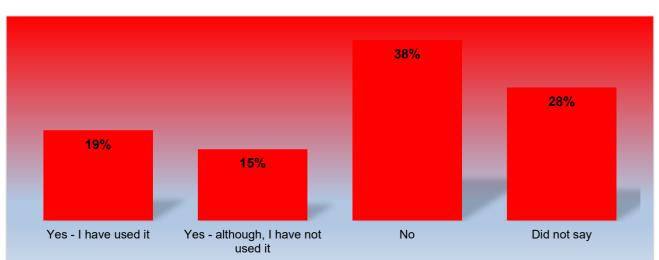


Diagram 4 – Awareness among responding parents/carers of the City of London FIS

3.13 All responding parents/carers were asked if they were aware of the COLTALE Programme (City of London Talks and Listens Enthusiastically), which aims to support children to develop the best possible speech, language and communication skills.

Response	Percentage of relevant responding parents/carers
Did Not Say	29%
No	56%
Yes - although, I have not used it	7.5%
Yes - I have used it	7.5%

Table 5 indicates that approximately (only) 1 : 6 of responding parents were aware of the COLTALE programme in spring 2022.

Parents and carers were also invited to feedback on best Start for Life themed services and activities – and the extent to which they accessed such provision(s) or whether they may like to in the future, possibly as part of an extended geographical scope of offer by (the Aldgate School-based) City Child and Family Centre.

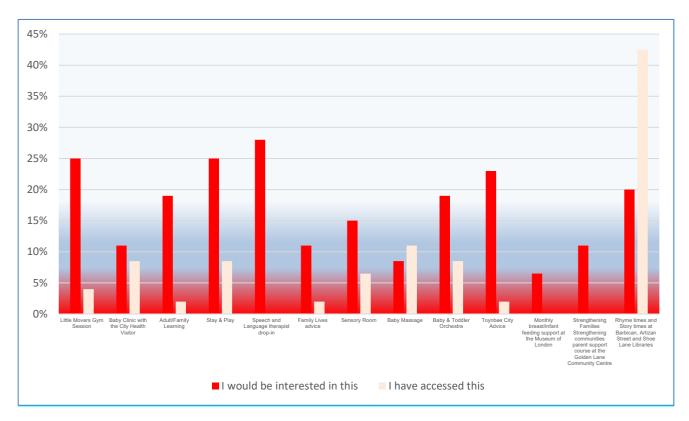


Diagram 6 – Feedback on Start for Life type services, activities and provisions

Diagram 6 indicates that the three types of activities and forms of support that responding parents/carers had evidently accessed at some point in time with the highest frequency were:

- 1. Rhyme times and Story times at Barbican, Artizan Street and Shoe Lane Libraries
- 2. Baby Clinic with the City Health Visitor
- 3. Drop-in Stay and Play family sessions

It also indicates that the three types of activities and forms of support that responding parents/carers would evidently consider accessing at some point including as part of an extended offer from City Child and Family Centre were:

- 1. Speech and Language therapist drop-in
- 2. Little Movers and Gyms sessions
- 3. Drop-in Stay and Play family sessions