

Young People's Engagement and Participation of Children in Care Council and Care Leavers

Executive Summary:

The Council4Kids, the "Children in Care Council" (CICC), is the forum where Walsall's looked after children, young people and care leavers are able to shape and influence the parenting and support that they receive.

This report describes some of the highlights of the CICC since the last Corporate Parenting Board on 8th September 2021.

Reason for bringing to the Corporate Parenting Board:

To provide the Corporate Parenting Board an update on the activities of the CICC which will allow the Board to offer any support to the children, in partnership with strategic management as corporate parents for looked after children.

We are keen to ensure that the CICC is encouraged to share highlights and raise any issues and concerns they may have on behalf of care experienced young people in Walsall with a view to improving services and outcome for children in the care of Walsall Council.

The Shadow Board has been put in place to ensure that the young people are fully involved in the Corporate Parenting Board and that their views are considered as part of this process

Recommendations:

The Board notes the activity and events of the Children in Care Council.

Background papers:

Previous Young People Engagement reports.

Corporate Parenting Pledges

The Walsall Promise for all Children in Care and Care Leavers

Resource and legal considerations:

Walsall is committed to ensuring that children and young people are involved in decision making and processes that directly affect their lives through.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduced seven Corporate Parenting Principles and 2 of the principles focus on the involvement and participation of children and young people:

- Encourage children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
- Take account of a child or young person's views, wishes and feelings

Article 12 United Nations Convention on the Rights of The Child says that children and young people have the human right to have opinions and for these opinions to be heard and taken seriously and taken seriously.

Council Corporate Plan Priorities:

- Children have the best possible start and are safe from harm, happy, healthy and learning well.
- People have increased independence, improved health and can positively contribute to their communities.

Citizen impact:

The services and the improvements play a key role in the quality of life and outcomes for the children, young people and families of Walsall. The Council and its partners as Corporate Parents make critical contributions to improve outcomes.

Environmental impact:

None.

Performance management:

The Children's Champion works with children in care and our care experienced young people to ensure that our CICC is a rich and engaging forum. Regular reports are provided to the Director of Children's Services and the Corporate Parenting Board.

Reducing inequalities:

The children in care council seeks to secure improvements in the equality of services, which, when achieved will have a positive impact on our most vulnerable children, young people and their families.

Consultation:

The CICC is one of the key forums through which services for children in care and care leavers seek to consult on service delivery and where children and young people are able to shape and influence the parenting they receive at every level.

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Report: Young People's Engagement and Children in Care Council	
1.1	Total Respect Training
	<p>To date we have delivered 9 Total Respect courses to professionals in Walsall. We have 6 care leavers trained that deliver the course. The feedback from attendees is really powerful and this really encourages our care leavers, boosting their confidence and self-esteem. The skills that our care leavers gain through delivering this help them in so many ways, here are a few:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financially • Work experience which they can use when applying for jobs or training course • Working as part of a team • Speaking and delivering workshops to groups of people • Improves their listening skills <p>We have 5 staff trained to deliver Total Respect and this is growing. On the 24th and 25th of October one of our new residential home staff is attending the training and will be taking 1 or 2 young people along over to Birmingham which will increase our numbers again.</p> <p>There are two areas which we want to focus on moving forward:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To train some younger people maybe consider training several young people aged 14 – 16 years. So far we have trained 6 care leavers to deliver Total Respect and by training up some younger children we think this could add value to the training as well as providing some really good experience for them. <p>To book some training dates in the school holidays; we feel this may open up opportunities for young people as they should not be at school or college and may mean we get a different cohort of staff able to access the training.</p>
1.2	Council4Kids groups
	<p>The Children in Care council when meeting with a Head of Service recently called themselves just a '<i>reference group</i>', this is a powerful statement and one we need to address. We are looking to revise the way the Children in Care council and the Care Leavers function to enable them to be more participatory and as we move forward co-producers. The Participation Team are working with the Children in Care Council to refresh the way they operate, to explore their priorities for the year to inform an annual work plan. This will mean that the work of the council is more focused and can more effectively drive forward positive change.</p> <p>One of the first changes that has been made is to separate out the two councils into primary and secondary age groups, although we have taken a child centred approach to this and been thoughtful about the needs of our young people in which group works best for them. So far, we can really see the benefits of having two different groups. We are able to make the sessions more age appropriate which makes it easier to engage the whole group and they seem to be more focused and eager to join in.</p>

We have started considering some of their priorities and have been discussing some important topics with them. Here is a flavour of what they have been saying:

What should we put in our Newsletter?

How can adults help you?

Don't feel scared to title yourself LGBTQ.

Promote the CiCC group.

I am interested in having an Independent Visitor.

Always happy for more children to join our group.

Try new food and share recipes – vegetarian and meat options.

Be proud of who you are.

These are the responses gathered from our Primary Council4Kids group. We will be using their ideas to help shape our new Newsletter.

What should young people be asked when they stop receiving support from social workers?

What other support would you like?

Social workers always look after people.

How do you feel?

If you can see your parents.

Find answers to your questions.

Have you got any questions that I can help with?

You don't judge children.

If your parents don't get in contact then how can you see them?

Social workers don't always listen.

	<p>These are the responses we have gathered from the Primary group and we will also be doing the same exercise with the Secondary group. This work is helping to shape the new feedback forms that will be sent to children across the system (not just children in our care) when they finish having a social worker. Although it is early days, we can see that the restructure of our children in care councils is already allowing to better focus on co-production with the children who attend.</p> <p>Moving forward some of the work we have planned is to create a series of videos about issues regarding being in care, such as what can I expect from my review, what can I expect from my personal education planning meeting etc. To help support young people's participation in decision making in their own lives.</p>
1.3	Children in Care Council and Corporate Parenting Board
	<p>David has been undertaking consultation with young people over the last 6 months to understand their perspective about the current approach to their work with the Corporate Parenting Board and below is a summary of their perspectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people have shared it can feel scary to attend the board because it feels like a professionals meeting, they can feel like a rabbit in a head light and can feel it is difficult to join in with the discussions. • Young people have shared that they are 'switched off' by the discussions at the board, and can be bored or not understand what is being discussed if it isn't relevant to them. • Young people have shared that they feel that they are not being consulted about what is heard at the board or having a say in what is discussed and so feel it can be led by the adults. • Some of the young people have shared that when they share their individual experience they can feel shut down. They share it has been said that they are not there to share their personal experience and there to represent the wider views of Walsall young people, but they don't have opportunity to get the wider views to share at the board. • It is also felt that the Children in Care Council (CICC) does not have links to the Corporate Parenting Board at this time, and it is only the Care Leavers forum who are engaging with the board. <p>As a Local Authority we have met with Councillor Wilson to think through how we can respond to the young people's perspective and refresh the way the children in care council, care leavers forum and corporate parenting board work together. The proposed approach would answer the issues they have raised and continue to allow a strong working relationship between the Corporate Parenting Board and children in care. The proposals below have been informed by learning from national best practice.</p>

- To answer the young people's concerns that they are not included in decision making about what is considered with the Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) a meeting could be held between the members of the CPB, democratic services, senior managers from the local authority, and CICC and CL forum. At this meeting, there could be a discussion about what should be heard at CPB. There are likely to be clear priorities set by CPB and local authority but the children and young people views could also be considered, what are their priorities of where member's scrutiny should be focused and how can this be addressed. When an agenda for the year is agreed it could be decided which forum/s would be best for reports to be considered at by the young people (ie CICC/Care Leavers forum, residential forum). It may be during the year, young people identify priorities they wish for the CPB to consider in addition to what is agreed, and where there is capacity consideration could be given to how this will be accommodated. It is recognised this may not be feasible for this year but consideration could be given to this informing future programmes of activity.
- The young people's feedback suggests that considering reports at CPB can be quite overwhelming for them and can lead them to either not contributing fully or switching off. To answer this CPB could recommend that the author of any report coming to CPB have to first share it with the appropriate children's participation forum. This could be done in a child friendly way, with support from the Participation team to think about how they can effectively engage young people in the learning from their report. The author should be willing to take on board ideas and ways of addressing practice identified within this meeting into their report and young people's ideas should inform future action planning. CPB may want to consider requesting that authors ensure they include in their reports the learning they have taken from the young people and what they plan to do about this. The author and young people may also agree that there are actions which would benefit from further involvement from the CICC/CLF in progressing and this will be timetabled into the young people's annual work plan.
- To enable young people to feel like they are providing a broader perspective and not just sharing their own views, the CICC and CL forum could also be supported to undertake wider consultation work with the cohort of children in care/care leavers to inform their thinking. The CPB may also identify particular issues they want this wider perspective on and request this is sought via the Participation team.
- Where the report coming to Corporate Parenting board is a proposal, for example, for a new initiative or approach, it could be directed by CPB that the CICC and/or CLF should be involved at

	<p>the beginning of the process to help inform its development and there should be ongoing engagement throughout this process.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Children in Care Council and/or Care Leavers forum will be supported to present their views about the reports they have considered. Where they feel confident and willing, young people will be supported to do this in person at CPB. However, it is recognised that for some young people we work with this may be too overwhelming and they may wish to present their views in different ways, for example, via the Participation Officer or using creative methods, the primary CICC may for example, want to make a poster which helps members to understand their thoughts. The CPB could direct the Participation Officer to take back to the young people what was discussed and agreed. This can also be communicated to the wider care population via the newly refreshed newsletters. The CPB could request a participation annual report be shared and this could include reports from the different participation forums, young people could be supported to come and help to present this report. • In addition, the Corporate Parenting Board could propose a schedule of more informal meetings with the Children in Care Council, Care Leavers forum and our Children’s home forums. This would allow them to undertake face to face participation sessions to consider specific issues or themes and plan together about how these could be addressed. These could either be as part of the existing work programme of the board or additional sessions. In terms of frequency this could be as regularly as it is felt useful, it is likely they would be a minimum of twice a year but can be arranged to meet what members feel would be helpful. In some Local Authorities the whole board attend these meetings, in other authorities these kind of meetings are just attended by the chair of the board. Typically senior managers from the Local Authority also attend. These meetings are often held in a venue which the young people feel comfortable in and will include more informal ice breakers alongside the more structured participation activity. • These options will allow for a robust line of communication between the young people and CPB, enhance the opportunities for children in care as well as care leavers to contribute to Corporate Parenting Board and allow us to meaningfully co-produce activity to affect positive change.
1.4	Good news stories!
	<p>As it is care leavers week from the 24th to the 28th of October we have decided to do something a little different to celebrate some of our care leaver’s success. We have put together a number of short videos where our</p>

	<p>care leavers have been happy to send us some recordings and this will be presented to several managers, staff, elected members and other young people with lived experience. We would request that we can have ten/fifteen minutes of the meeting at the next panel to share these with you.</p> <p>In essence the young people have shared with us their accomplishments which stem from going to university to learning to passing a test for their bike so they can drive to work, to competing in athletic competitions!</p>
<p>1.5</p>	<p>Children’s home forum</p>
	<p>We have started to work with the staff and our young people at all three of our residential homes. One of our care leavers Aisha that delivers the Total Respect training with us has a keen passion to be involved with our residential homes. She has lived in two residential homes herself so has some real life experience and ideas on how to engage some young people and how we can start to think of making some positive changes. We are looking at how she can support the delivery of the work with these young people. One of our initial tasks as a group is to support the Residential team with coming up with a name for our two new homes in Walsall. What we would like to do is to try and give them names that are different to our current ones as currently Redruth and Hilton are named after the roads where they are on. We are also hoping to work with the young people over the next couple of months to develop a video about living in our children’s homes again to support young people about what they can experience. We are developing training for all staff to support active participation of children in their own lives and plan to offer this to the staff at our residential homes in the new year.</p> <p>Bluebells: Given the complex needs of the young people at Bluebells and that a number of our young people accessing this support are non-verbal we have to think differently about how we capture their views and engage them in the work of the home. David and Sophia are due to attend a Unit Meeting on the 1st of November to speak to all of the staff with their manager Glen to consider some different options of how we can get the voice of our young people there.</p> <p>Redruth: We have had started to meet with Redruth monthly, so far 3 out of the 4 young people there have attended. At this point we are spending time building some connection with them. The focus of our discussions in October were regarding Total Respect and trying to engage them in the training. Unfortunately they did not feel confident enough to attend the two day training in Birmingham so David and Sophia will consider some other options in training them back in Walsall if they are still keen to get involved. The young people at Redruth are saying that they are keen to work with us and in November we will discuss what they want their priorities to be.</p> <p>Sophia and Aisha’s wanted to share as this was their first visit to the home that they felt the home had a lovely vibe. They thought it felt really welcoming and homely with a personal touch. The living spaces looked and felt really nice and they like the pictures of the young people on display on several walls.</p>

	<p>Hilton:</p> <p>We have two teenage girls living at Hilton Road, at this time they are less keen to engage in participation activity with us but one of the girls connected really well with Aisha. We recognise it may take a little time to get them on board and we will focus the next couple of months on relationship building with the young people to try and engage them in more co-production moving forward. There are some challenges in terms of the dynamics between the two young people here and we will need to be thoughtful about how we support this moving forward. One of the young people at the home is considering joining the Council4Kids group so we will continue to work with her to encourage her to engage in this.</p>						
1.6	Regional Participation work						
	<p>On the 8th of September David attended the regional blueprint launch in Birmingham with a care leaver and two managers from the Transitional and Leaving Care service. This was a great event where we got to share and hear from others the great things that we and other councils do for care leavers as part of the Local Offer.</p> <p>David continues to meet with the regional participation group every month and will be leading on a piece of work around a West Midlands regional offer for transport. David is hoping to lead a piece of work across the region where we can understand the real life experience of care leavers looking at the cost and impact of travel on them with a view to being able to make proposals to the companies across the Black Country. David will be able to provide further updates to this in future meetings.</p>						
1.7	Dates for the diary						
	<p>New dates for the Council4Kids group:</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>3rd October Secondary group – TLC hub 4:30 – 6pm</td> </tr> <tr> <td>10th October Care Leavers group – TLC hub 4:30 – 6:30</td> </tr> <tr> <td>17th November Primary group - TLC hub 4:30 – 6pm</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1st December Secondary group - TLC hub 4:30 – 6pm</td> </tr> <tr> <td>8th December Care Leavers group - TLC hub 4:30 – 6:30</td> </tr> <tr> <td>15th December Joint Christmas Celebration – all ages</td> </tr> </table>	3rd October Secondary group – TLC hub 4:30 – 6pm	10th October Care Leavers group – TLC hub 4:30 – 6:30	17th November Primary group - TLC hub 4:30 – 6pm	1st December Secondary group - TLC hub 4:30 – 6pm	8th December Care Leavers group - TLC hub 4:30 – 6:30	15th December Joint Christmas Celebration – all ages
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David Hughes
Children's Champion