

Young Peoples Engagement

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.

Contact Officer:

Full Name – David Hughes

 . 01922 650555/ 07787 284682

Email: david-j.hughes@walsall.gov.uk

Report: Young People's Engagement and Children in Care Council

1.0 Introduction

The following items are some of the highlights that have happened since the last Corporate Parenting Board in September 2021.

1.1 Interview Panels

The CICC have been involved with some very important interviews panels:

On 1st and 2nd September we took a huge leap forward in our first face to face interview panel for the last 18 months. Three of our care leavers met with the Children's Champion the week before to decide on the questions that would be asked and a plan for how they would chair this panel indignantly with no support from our staff. They chaired two full days of interviews listening to and taking notes for candidates applying for Personal Advisor (PA) roles. They used the official council scoring sheets to take their notes and then had the opportunity at the end of each day to feedback to the managers in the Transition Leaving Care (TLC) hub.

On 13th and 14th September the CICC were involved in an interview panel to support with appointing several *Senior Practitioners (Social Workers)*. Two of our care leavers gave up their time to support with virtual interview panels these interviews. Again as above all of the questions and the structure of these interviews was decided by the care leavers themselves giving them full control to be creative.

The CICC have been involved with some very important interviews this year and are always putting the pressure on people wanting to work in Walsall. In order to give this process some consistency the Children's Champion and Care Leaver Ambassador will write up a proposal which will be considered by the Head of Service.

1.2 Face-to-face meetings

On 9th September was our first CICC meeting that took place in person. We now have the 'Green light' to go ahead with our CICC meetings so are taking advantage of this but ensuring we do this in a safe way and will continue to review this in the light of increasing infection rates.

We attempted to do this in a blended style having young people in person at the TLC hub as well as being live on Teams. This was not very successful due to the background noise in the room, the lack of a good level of sound via Teams using a laptop.

We want to include as many attendees as possible so the way we hold these meetings is under constant review so we have met both at the TLC hub and some via the online method.

1.3 Launch of new care leavers Group

Our Care Leavers Group continues to be promoted by Personal Advisors (PA's). Our first meeting was held on 30th of September with a get together at

Nando's at the Crown Wharf in Walsall. We welcomed 10 care leavers that turned up most of whom have not been involved with the CICC previously.

New friendships were made and they all regularly speak to each other now when they see each other. Helping our care leavers connect with each other has been extremely rewarding.

During this first session we gained valuable feedback on our Local Offer:

- Majority really liked the format of 2 local authorities (S and T).
- When they took a vote we had more votes for T.
- They feel that the local offer should be short but efficient and straight to the point.
- They thought that some were too lengthy and they felt they wouldn't want to look through or read this much information.
- They felt having a contents page is very useful so they can go straight to a particular section when needed.
- They also really liked the colours used in this local offer.
- They like the look and feel of local authority S- really like the pictures in this and the fact it is short and not too lengthy.



1.4 **Care Leavers Ambassador Appointment**

We are delighted to announce that Sophia Begum has joined us and she has had to hit the ground running. Sophia started this exciting position during the start of our two week Ofsted inspection. Sophia is working part time and will help compliment the important work we are doing with our CICC and our newly formed Care Leavers group. Please take a look at the October (7th) edition of our Newsletter which she has created which has been shared with this report.

We aim to appoint a second Care Ambassador in 2022.

1.5 **Coproduction with SEND**

The Children's Champion has been in discussions with Maria Kidd and Natali Borman to offer support with co-production with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) service. They are looking to gather the voice of young people more within their work which will support them within their journey to be more inclusive from a young person's perspective. They have heard great things about the work of the CiCC and want to replicate what we do so we are more than happy to help assist them.

1.6 **Video Recording for Health Assessment**

The Children's Champion has been busy working in partnership with the Looked After Children's Nurses. The purpose of the video is to help provide information to other young people in care where one of our lovely care leavers is narrating over a visual walk through for initial health assessments and annual health reviews. This was recorded on the 14th and 21st October and we are hoping to share the video with you by the time of the November Corporate Parenting Board

1.7 **Meeting Ofsted Inspectors**

What a turn out for our Ofsted visit!

8 young people met with the Inspector at the Town Hall. They all engaged in discussions and not one of them was phased by the visit and they all took it in their stride to share many of the positive things they experience in Walsall as well as some of the things they are passionate about which they feel require change.

1.8 **Connecting with the Foster Carers Community**

The Children's Champion has been working more closely with the Fostering Service and our Mockingbird foster carers. We are strengthening our relationships and this is proving to have some success in gaining new introductions to our CiCC group who are the next generation of young people attending the Corporate Parenting Board in the future.

1.9 **Involving and widening representation of children and young people**

Our activities and engagement is beginning to attract more children and young people who have not previously been involved. We will monitor this over the next 3 months. We are actively promoting and aiming to widen our involvement of children in care and those who have left care in the CiCC and Care Leavers forum by engaging professionals, carers and our children and young people , foster carers and

1.10 **Care Leavers Week: 25th to 29th October**

Monday 25th –

We began care leavers week with a trip to the Cinema with young people joining us to watch Venom 2 and they all thoroughly enjoyed themselves. This helped provide a valuable, non-threatening social activity for care leavers who before this event may never have met.

Tuesday 26th

Walk at the Arboretum with some of our young people

Wednesday 27th -

As part of Black History Month a group of young people with their Personal Advisors went to the Liverpool to visit the International Slavery Museum.

We engaged with a fun trip to Hollywood Bowl. Five young people participated and gained some confidence and new skills in team work. We played against each other to win at bowling, pool and air hockey. This really was a wonderful

thing to be part of watching everyone have fun, interact and encourage each other.

Thursday 28th -

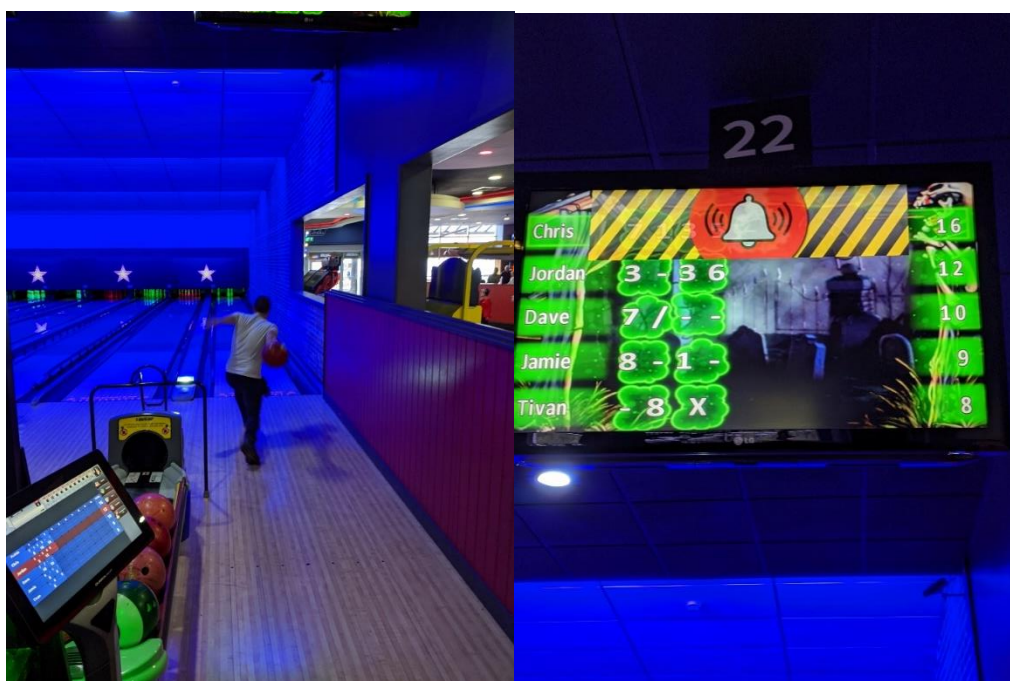
Trip to Birmingham and Mini Golf

Trip to London and as part of this young people visited Speaker's Corner and the Houses of Parliament, focusing on the importance of participation and encouraging/empowering to get their voices heard.

Friday 29th - Bloxwich Leisure Centre with a group of young people focused on access to leisure passes, eating healthy and activities available for them.

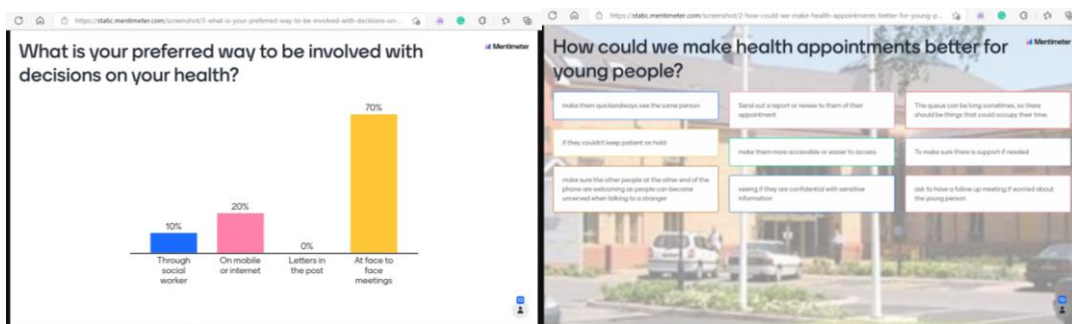
We had many laughs during this week and we hope to welcome new members.

Our plan for Care Leavers Week in 2022 is more aspirational and will be jointly developing this with our Young People over the Summer



1.11 The way we gather feedback

We have started trialing out the use of a web platform called MentiMeter as a means to gather feedback from young people. It is a very fun and interactive platform that is easily accessible and can be successful in many ways. We are hoping to use this on a larger scale in an attempt to gather the views of all of our children in care in Walsall as well as our care leavers. This can be accessed from any mobile phone, laptop or tablet and can be done on the move and is quick and easy. We hope to start creating more of these with the support from senior managers, directors and the elected members. See examples below



1.12 Celebrations and Achievements

- One of our CICC Tivan has played the Piano and sang to a live audience at a live event. We are extremely proud of her and wanted to congratulate her on this.
- Our very own Kim has started her painting and decorating apprenticeship and is now doing hands on work within this exciting trade which she is really enjoying. Keep up the good work Kim!

1.13 Dates for forthcoming events and children in care council meetings.

Meetings will continue to be held every other week using a blended approach both virtually and in person at Transition Leaving Care Hub. We will keep this under review to ensure that we remain complaint with the Council's guidelines.

11th November – Care Leavers Group to meet with Jivan (HOS)
18th November – CICC meeting
2nd December – CICC meeting
16th December – CICC meeting

- 1.14 Finally I would like to remind everyone and anyone working with children in Walsall that Participation and Engagement should be at the forefront of everyone's agenda. Working 'With' Children, capturing 'Their' voice and being 'Proactive' in every engagement opportunity should not be an add on to the work we do with young people but should be seen as a matter of cause and be a priority for all in shaping the support and services in which we provide.

David Hughes
Children's Champion