

Young People Engagement.

Executive Summary:

The Council4Kids, the “Children in Care Council”, 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. Since the last Corporate Parenting Board on 2nd November 2020 young people continued to meet virtually due to Corvid 19.

Reason for bringing to the Corporate Parenting Board:

To inform the Corporate Parenting Board about enrichment activities provide for Children in Care and Care Leavers since November 2020.

Recommendations:

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

Background papers:

None

Corporate Parenting Pledges

The Council’s Promise to Looked After Children have been refreshed by listening to what our young people and these are attached in Appendix 1.

Resource and legal considerations:

The Children in Care Council is supported by the Children’s Champion and Participation Apprentice.

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 looked after and care experienced young people to ensure that the Council4Kids Influencers is 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 families

Consultation:

The children in care council 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

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1** Care experienced Children and Young People have a chance to meet through Walsall's Council4kids Influencers forum where they **"Have a SAY"** about the things that really matter in their lives. Children and young people are able to have influence and shape the services and policies which impact on the parenting and support that they receive at every level. The forum enables young people to build friendships peer networks whilst learning new skills. Walsall Children in Care Council Influencers has met virtually since March 2020 due to Covid -19. The plans for the future are for the Influencers to meet face to face.

1.2 Digital Technology:

Children and young people have continued to adapt to having their meetings virtually. The continued use of Teams and Zoom in the new way of working is proving to be successful, enabling children and young people to connect with their peers near and far to build positive connections. We continue to use WhatsApp's to create different groups for young people to share information effectively speedy responses and fun activities. However we are looking forward to face to face meetings when we are able to do so in line with Government Guidance.

1.3 Key updates since Nov 2020

1. The young people's advisory panel met in October. They shared their views and have the expertise and skills to inform how we can further innovate and improve engagement and participation of children and young people. Their findings will be shared with the working group to develop and implement the Participation Strategy Plan. The young people said they enjoyed the experience and for the expertise, knowledge and time were rewarded with vouchers.
2. As we continue to increase the participation and engagement of young people we are developing the Children in Care Council mini influencers who are aged between 9 to 12 years. The mini influencers will mirror the Influencers group whereby they have a chair and in their meetings discuss important things that matter to them. Weekly meetings are now being undertaken for both groups of Influencers to keep up the momentum and enthusiasm of the groups whilst we operate virtually and there are restrictions on activities. The younger influencers are busy composing a letter to give to other young people when they come into care.
3. Young people will meet with the Corporate Parenting Board in the New Year. This opportunity is welcomed by the young people as they are getting to know their Corporate Parents and can discuss issues that matter to them in an open arena to improve services they access. We have been preparing for meeting in January 2021.
4. Our young people continue to influence change and have been busy contributing their views as part of the Health Passports review to explore how meaningful it is. Young people between the ages of 17-22 years were spoken to individually. Each young person was very open and shared their understanding of the health passport.

In addition colleagues from Heath were invited to the young people's meeting to discuss young people's health journey and how this could be improved and make the experience more meaningful. The young people engaged and shared their journey. Some of the ideas they explored was developing young people's health champions. The health champions would be young people who would meet with health professionals monthly to look at health issues raised by young people to look at how they can support young people in a holistic and effective way.

5. A review around the support for young parents is underway to ensure they are getting a service conducive to their needs. Each young mom was consulted through a lengthy discussion around the service they received during and after pregnancy to improve service delivery on our offer to our young parents.
6. Young people continue to be involved in improving the services they access and have now shared their experience of the support they received around housing to look at what we can do better in shaping the future of the service. The report will be shared at the Corporate Parenting Board.
7. It is important that our young people continue to be involved in the recruitment process of staff and foster carers coming to Walsall. In their meetings this is a regular topic of discussion. It is a firm favourite of our young people as they discuss the positive impact of being involved therefore would like to continue to influence decision making.

Young people have therefore put together a proposal to send out to The Fostering Service and Head of Service around the importance of young people's involvement through the young people's panel. The proposal highlights what young people can bring when they are involved in the process the benefits to the organisation. (See Appendix 2)

8. The dedicated Transition and Leaving Care Service are busy preparing the yearly festive hampers for our Care Leavers. The festive period can be even more isolating and a lonely time for many of our young people especially during this lockdown period. As it is not possible for the annual celebratory festive meal provided by the service. The Leaving Care service are doing their best ensuring our care leavers hampers are bigger and are aware of services within the community that provide a Christmas meal. It is really disappointing that we will not be able to have our annual Christmas Meal due to the Government's restrictions.

1.4 Our Meetings:

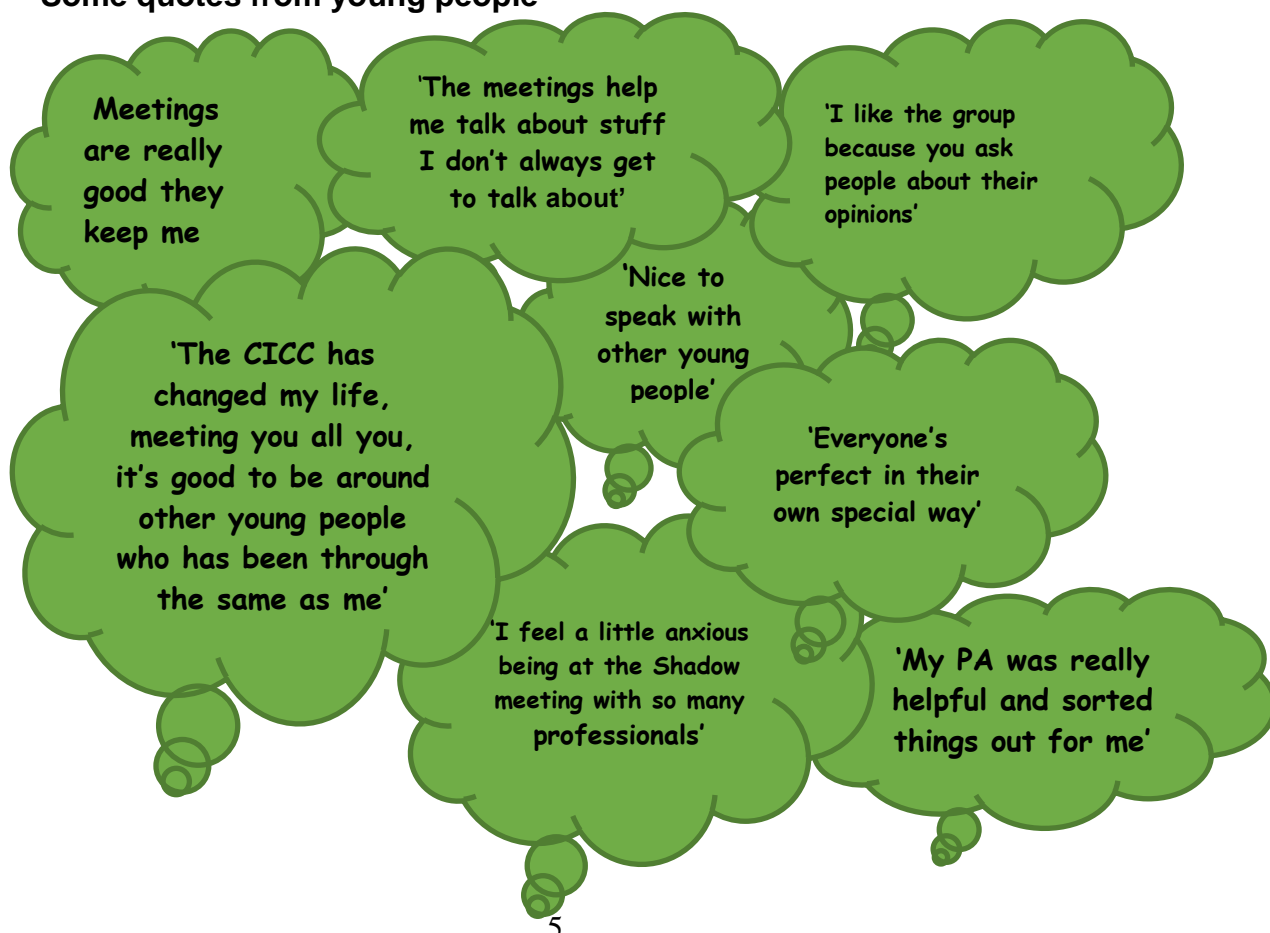
Our meetings now weekly whilst we remain in Tier 3 and comply with the Government's guidance. Young people recognise the difficulties of not connecting with their peers can have on their mental wellbeing so the weekly meetings enables our young people to build new peer connections have a weekly focus whilst there are restrictions on activities.

1. During the meetings young people have had fun and started to get to know each other whilst working on serious issues. The Mini Influencers have their meetings first followed by the Influencers. The Mini influencers have an elected a chair and start their meetings with an icebreaker, The Mini Influencers have

discussed bullying during anti bullying week and made pledges. The Influencers are busy creating a letter to invite young people who come into care the opportunity to attend the Children In Care Council and become an influencer. Young people have discussed what we would like to consider in our annual survey and decided they wanted to focus on children and young peoples' health and wellbeing during Lockdown.

2. At our meeting we had the pleasure of meeting with Lesley Hudson the Interim Independent Reviewing Officer who came and spoke to the young people about helping to redesign the feedback forms used by the foster families Lesley chatted with the young people about her role whilst getting to know the young people. Young people have started to review the forms and give feedback.
3. At the Shadow Board on 2nd November 2020, our young people had the opportunity to speak with their Corporate Parents around issues that impact on them and update them about the work they are doing around improving the services.
4. As part of our fun activities leading up to festive celebrations the young people have launched Mischievous Elf. Young people have been given Elves and they have been sending in pictures of their elf in fun places. All the Influencers who have attended the Children in Care Council Meeting received their individual Elf via the post. The young people loved their elves and have started having fun (See appendix 1). As part of fun things, as a festive celebration is not possible, young people have decided to have theirs on line, Young people will wear something festive, play games and have their dinner or treats all at the same time.

Some quotes from young people



1.5 Partnership working

1. As a trailblazer for The Care Leavers Covenant we continue our partnership working. The Covenant recently interviewed a young person about life as a care leaver and their educational journey having registered with their portal, which offers tailored information specifically for the young person around their educational career interest. The young person found this to be a good experience and is looking forward to further interviews.

During National Care Leavers Celebration week 26th October to 2nd November, young people had the opportunity to attend the Virtual YPBMF (Young Peoples Bench Marking Forum) Care Leavers Celebration. We had fun and games through the use digital technology which brought many young people together. (See Appendix 3)

One young person said ***‘The young people’s bench marking forum online event was brilliant so many inspirational young people with incredible stories and just so nice to see care leavers from all over the country doing positive things making a difference, making a difference leaving their mark’***

2. As part of the Regional Participation Working Group we now have Walsall young people who are active members alongside different local authorities’ young people who will be contributing to developing a Regional Participation Strategy. Young people will play a key role in developing the forward section of the strategy looking at what they see as Participation and the importance of young people’s involvement. Our young people had the opportunity to share the important work they are doing in Walsall and listen to what the other local authorities are doing. It was a fantastic networking opportunity as our young people will start to build peer networks. Our young people found the group very inspiring which created a buzz, enabling them to start to look creative ways of engagement.

A young person said ***‘I loved it, Hearing everyone’s plans and ideas and outputs on so many different problems, It seemed very positive and ALL about the young people. Everyone listened well and respected ideas, couldn’t have gone better’***

‘The things about young moms really touched me and brought a tear to my eye’

3. We continue to partnership work with the Walsall Safeguarding Partnership. YSP (Youth Safeguarding Partners) have been meeting virtually and we are in the process of recruiting more young people across the service to strengthen the partnership to joint work with the Influencers of the Children in Care council.

1.6 **Celebrations and achievements of some of our young people:**

- ✓ Children in Care Council continue to thank all the professionals who make a difference in young people’s life and have not stopped working through Lock down to keep children and young people safe.

- ✓ Well done to all our children and young people who have had a difficult time during lockdown but have continued to attend school, college and university. We know it has not been easy for many of you
- ✓ Well done to our new Mini Influencers, they have fun share ideas and welcome new members.

1.7 Total Respect Training:

Total Respect Training is important as it enables professionals to work more effectively with children and young people. As we approach the new norm discussions with Training and Development has been undertaken to deliver the training online however further discussions need to be undertaken with the young people to ensure they are comfortable delivering the training in a new way.

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

9th Dec 2020
16th Dec 2020
6th Jan 2021
13th Jan 2021
27th Jan 2021
10th Feb 2021
24th Feb 2021
10th Mar 2021
24th Mar 2021

Some dates may be subject to changes and meetings will continue to be held virtually

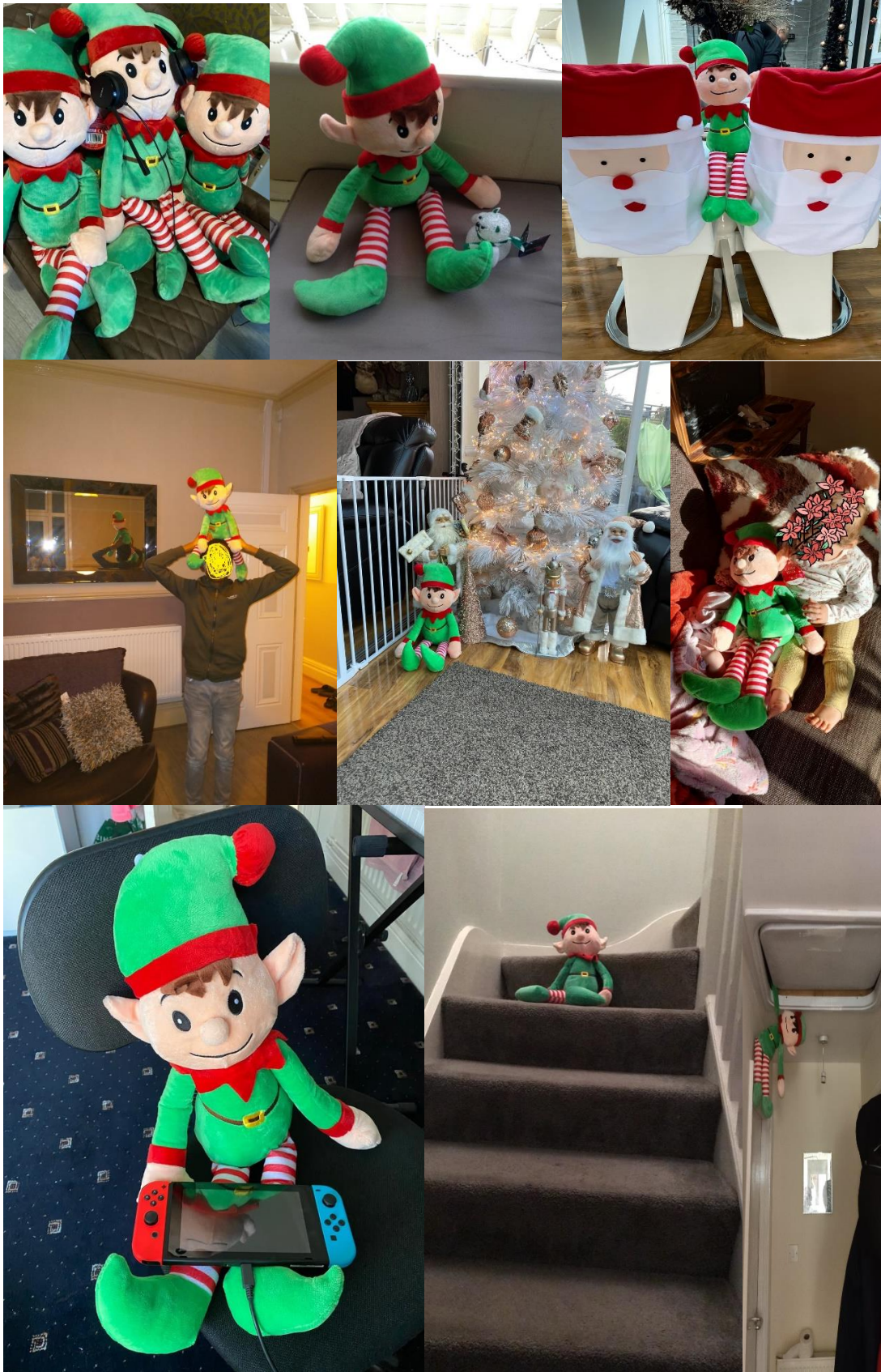
Finally we say farewell to the Children's Champion Michelle, who has supported the Children and Young People of Walsall over the last 2 years.

The Children's Champion would like to say a big farewell and thank you for all at the Corporate Parenting Board for their continued support of our young people.

Thank you Councillor Wilson for chairing the meetings that are always about being ambitions and having aspirations for our young people and would like to wish the new Children's Champion the very best and every success in their new role.

Appendix 1

Young people having festive fun with their Elf's.





Appendix 2

Young Peoples Proposal for young people interview panel.

Proposal for Young people to be involved more in the recruitment process.

The Influencers Children in Care Council would like to propose that when staff and foster carers are recruited by Walsall Council and they have involvement directly or indirectly with Children and families, that they are involved in the interview process or the training through a young people's panel.

The participation of children and young people in decision-making has been an important principle since the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1992). In particular, Article 12 of the UNCRC upholds the child's right to be heard. Children and young people can play a valuable role in the recruitment of staff within organisations.

The young people will be prepared for the interview process so they know what to expect. The Influencers Children in Care Council have discussed in their meetings the importance of being involved and think it is very important that you continue to listen to them and use their expertise to recruit the best staff who help look after Children and young people with Care experience.

What young people say about being involved in the interview process?

'We do have a right to be involved in decisions about us the law tells us this'

'Involvement in panel interviews will allow others to see how interviewee interact with young people, so their communication and problem-solving skills can be assessed in a practical scenario'.

'It will also give interviewee a chance to become aware of the concerns young people have, such as meeting a new social worker'

'I feel more confident and it has helped me learn new skills'

'I have met new friends being involved in the panel and we have had fun'

'We feel we are being listened to as we are able to contribute to the decision making around people making decision about us young people'

'For the first time ever I really feel listened to'

'I feel really important when we interview staff at the Civic'

Benefits to the organisation include:

Provides a clear message to existing staff, potential new recruits, funders, partner organisations, and young people, that the involvement and views of young people are at the heart of decision-making in Children's Social Care – improving service delivery by selecting candidates whose personal skills and qualities suit the needs of young people – demonstrating respect for children's rights in action (in line with Article 12 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of a Child).

The benefits to young people being on the Recruitment Panel.

- Increased confidence
- Develops valuable skills that will help them in the future
- Young people feel valued, recognising they have contributed to appointing the best candidate to the service.

- Improves communication skills between adults and peers.
- Feel listened to
- Can bring structure to their day
- Gives young people a sense of achievement

Our young people pictured preparing for the Young People's Interview Panel



Benefits to staff include:

- Staff working creatively with young people helps them to develop creatively.
- Builds relationships between young people and staff
- Staff will have a greater insight into young people's views by communicating with and listening to them.

What will candidates get from having young people interview them?

Candidates can demonstrate communication/interaction skills with young people. Being interviewed by children and young people provides a realistic role preview for those who haven't previously worked with children and young people.

Candidates have a first-hand opportunities to interact with the young people they will be working with or providing services for.

What some candidates have said about being interviewed by young people.

Feedback from candidates who had been interviewed by young people has been positive and commented afterwards that they had enjoyed the experience. Some have said they '**were nervous initially then felt relaxed when the young people made them feel at ease with their honest style of questioning**'. At the end of interviews many candidate complimented the young people on how well they had done and spoke about the benefits of having young people involved in the interview process. The Influencer's Children in Care Council would like you all to consider involving young people on the panel as it is important you work with us. We are a very **COMMITTED** group of young people who are Proud to represent care experienced children and young people of Walsall in contributing in influence the decision making.

If you would like to discuss our proposal further please contact the Chair of the
Children Care Council or The Children's Champion to discuss further
From
The Influencers Children in Care Council

Appendix 3

During Care Leavers week young people got involved had some fun doing virtual challenges and games.

