

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 15th February 2021, the young people have continued to meet virtually due to Covid-19. The report covers the period January and February 2021.

Reason for bringing to the Corporate Parenting Board:

To provide the Corporate Parenting Board and update on the activities of the CiCC.

Recommendations:

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

Background papers:

None

Resource and legal considerations:

The Children in Care Council is supported by the Children’s Champion. They continue to meet monthly and a set agenda is in place for each meeting.

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 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 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.

Contact Officer:

Full Name: David Hughes



01922 658412/0555 – 07787 284682

David-j.hughes@walsall.gov.uk

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 CiCC Influencers forum where they can 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 and peer networks whilst learning new skills. Walsall Children in Care Council Influencers has met virtually since March 2020 due to Covid -19 every Wednesday and this will continue whilst restriction remain in place. The plans for the future are for the Influencers to meet face to face every other week once we are able to access the TLC bub.

1.2 Virtual Meetings

The Children and Young People have now adapted to having their meetings virtually. The continued use of Microsoft Office Teams as a way to connect with our children remains successful, enabling them to connect with their peers to build positive connections. Children are familiar with online platforms as it compliments how some are currently accessing education.

We continue to use WhatsApp's as a preferred method identified by the children to connect with the Children's Champion and each other. This platform is also free to use and makes sharing pictures, text and resources easy to access. The appropriateness of this continues to be managed by the Childrens Champion.

1.3 Key updates since January 2021

1. **Handover of new Children's Champion:** David Hughes had the opportunity to shadow the previous Children's Champion and this enabled a smooth transition for the children all of which David has been able to retain engagement as part of the Influencers meetings.
2. **Housing:** David has supported the review of the arrangements with a local Housing Social Landlord. Two cohorts of young people took part which consisted of 18 – 25 year olds. One cohort with involvement from Children Services and the other with involvement from money home job. Some of the feedback form the Young People included:

"They felt their PA has supported with all their individual needs with things such as application forms, paperwork, dealing with organisations and professionals and any requests they have had in general. "

"Many YP feel that £2000 to buy all the things they require for indigent living is not enough which results in a struggle to get everything needed to live independently. Some stated that they had to have the cheapest or most basic items which broke or worn very quickly."

“Many of the YP that took part in the survey struggled to know who they had received support from in the Council’s Housing Officers or our Housing provider. Some could mention named workers but struggled to tell me which organisation they worked for. “

- 3. New recruits to the CiCC:** Since the last Corporate Parenting Board we have had 6 new young people referred to take part in the CiCC meetings. The Children’s Champion continues to meet with professionals to promote this across the services.
- 4. Public Health:** The Influencers have looked over information and literature on two leaflets providing valuable feedback from their perspective. The leaflets provide advice and information for young people about self-harm and suicide. Our Influencers gave very detailed feedback and critiqued the information which was fed back to Esther Higdon who was very pleased and thanked our young people for their support.
- 5. Participation in SEND:** The Children’s Champion has met with the lead Emma Thornbury to consider how young people can be supported to participate within the service. Further discussion are taking place as we seek to identify a SEND Champion.
- 6. Mentoring Programme:** Our young people are keen to get involved within mentoring children in care whereby they will be able to draw on their care experience to offer support to other care experienced children. This is also part of our Local Offer work for Care Leavers as we aim to appoint Care Leaver Ambassadors within our apprenticeship scheme.
- 7. Virtual School:** David has met with the team who were keen to get the voice of young people to help shape some of their practice. A representative from the virtual school will be invited to the CiCC once per month. We want to see young people chairing their own PEP meetings in school.
- 8. Children’s Homes:** David is keen to include more of our children in residential care in the CiCC meetings. In order to do this, the young people have discussed how they can advertise and promote the work of the CiCC to their peers in residential care in order to ensure that all children and young people have a say in the care that they are afforded.
- 9. Develop Champions:** After meeting with lots of different teams across services, we are now looking at to have champions within different service areas of the authority. We have already progressed this within Health but would also like to consider champions within Social Care and Education. The CiCC have been consulted and feel this is a great idea.

10. Care Leavers Covenant: David has met with Alex Latham who is our link to the Covenant. A meeting has been arranged on 30th March 2021 where we would like to review the current offer within Walsall and to also consider the West Midlands Combined Authority's offer. We aim to know of our current list of signatories in Walsall and to look at how we can grow the number of organisations and businesses signed up.

11. Interview Panels: David has been actively encouraging different managers and teams to consider having young people attend virtual interview panels. In March 2021 we will have a young person's interview panel to interview the candidates for the Lead Educational Psychologist post.

12. The Hollies (Independent Reviewing Officers IRO's): Our young people are being consulted on how this part of our service can improve the children's participation in their reviews and the support they have from their carer givers and social workers. Our care experienced young people's views are key to developing better services within Walsall.

1.4 CiCC Meetings Update:

Our meetings which are normally every two weeks are now weekly whilst lockdown still continues. Young people recognise the difficulties that not connecting with their peers can have on their mental wellbeing so the weekly meetings enables our young people to build new peer connections. This also provides a weekly focus whilst there are restrictions on activities.

1. At one of our recent meetings, we had the pleasure of Lesley Hudson the Interim Independent Fostering Reviewing Officer who came and spoke to the young people about helping to redesign the feedback forms completed by children and young people about their experience of being cared for in a foster family. Young people have started to review the forms and give feedback.
2. Our young people continue to engage with the Corporate Parenting Shadow Board. This gives them the opportunity to speak with their Corporate Parents around issues that impact them.
3. We have a new Cooking competition which commenced on 1st March where our young people are being encouraged to cook their favourite meal being as independent as they can. Throughout the next couple of weeks we are encouraging them to send in pictures to the Children's Champion where they have the opportunity to win a prize.

4. Some recent feedback from our children and young people



1. As a trailblazer for The Care Leavers Covenant we are committed to growing our invested partners. On the 30th March there will be a review meeting for professionals to attend where we look to further develop our local commitments and current signatories.
2. Our children and Young People have been involved in devising a Regional Participation Strategy which has been completed with views and support from our Influencers. This is a continual piece of work in partnership with other Local Authorities.
3. We continue to liaise with the Walsall Safeguarding Partnership. YSP (Youth Safeguarding Partners) have had meetings which have been

virtual. 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 appreciate some of the hard work and commitment from staff in Walsall that they come into contact with. They really do feel that the support they have received within this pandemic has been enhanced in some ways being able to go virtual.
- ✓ A massive thanks to the peer support that our young people offer each other during the weekly CICC meetings. They offer support to each other, encourage others to participate and praise one another for talking and supporting individuals within the group. This helps them feel supported encourages positive mental and emotional health.
- ✓ Well done to all of our mini influencers and influencers! They embrace change and welcome new members with open arms and have recently agreed to encourage guest speakers to attend their CICC meetings. This week we will be meeting with Lorraine Thompson from the Virtual School.

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

10th Mar 2021 – Meeting with EP service re interview Panels
17th Mar 2021 – Regional Participation Group
24th Mar 2021 – Young Carers Action day
31st Mar 2021 - Care Leavers Covenant

Meetings will continue to be held virtually on Microsoft Office Teams until further notice.

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