

Title of the Report: **Young People Engagement**

Executive Summary:

Children's Champion presented a report which set out a number of issues raised by children looked after and care leavers at the Corporate Parenting Board held on 2 July 2018. This report sets out the response to the issues raised by care leavers.

Reason for bringing to the Corporate Parenting Board:

To provide the Board with an update and the response to the report of the Children's Champion dated 2 July 2018.

Recommendations:

That:

1. The Board notes the response in respect of each issues raised.
2. The Children's Champion and the managers of the Transition and Leaving Care Service to meet with care leavers in respect of the response.

Background papers:

None

Corporate Parenting Pledges;

All of the Care Leavers pledges are relevant to this report:

- We will improve the transition into adulthood so that all young people leaving care are better prepared and supported to live independently.
- We will improve access to education, employment and training and help you with your career plans
- We will help you to experience stability in your lives, and feel safe and secure, including help to find and keep a stable place to live
- We will provide improved access to health support, and go to medical appointments with you if you are worried to go alone
- We will help you learn about budgeting and what bills to pay to help achievement of financial stability.
- We will respect you as individuals, not judge you on the past, and we will believe in your future
- We will listen to you, hear what you say and spend some time with you away from the office.

Resource and legal considerations:

The appointment of a dedicated officer was agreed in 2018 and the Children's Champion was appointed in May 2018.

The response to drive improvements plays a key role in the quality of life and outcomes for the children, young people and families of Walsall

Council Corporate Plan Priorities:

The Corporate Plan priorities that are linked to this report are:

- 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 improvements noted in the response 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 is working with the range of children looked after and care experienced young people to refresh and reconstitute the Council4Kid. A report on the work plan of the Children's Champion will be provide to the Director of Children's Services in September 2018.

Reducing inequalities:

The report sets out the response 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:

A consultation survey with children looked after and care leavers commenced in August 2018 and its findings will be evaluated in September 2018.

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Report: Response to the issues raised by children and young people:

Issue 1

Apprenticeships and work experience for young people with disabilities. When colleges cannot cater for their need, what other provisions are available? A young person with a disability who wanted to attend college however this specific college could not cater for their need stated 'I would like to be going to college in September like other young people'.

Response:

Young people with disabilities have the same rights to further education opportunities as any other young person. Children's Services and partners work collectively to support young people to move on to further education from school.

Social Workers, Personal Advisors, Information and Advice Workers as well the Impact Worker based at the Transition and Leaving Care Service work together to support children and young people to achieve their aspirations.

- The Virtual School will have a full time careers advisor to work with children looked after from the aged of 14-18. This person will be responsible for supporting with option choices, finding work experience places and post 16 education.
- The Council works with other post 16 to 25 education providers for example Walsall Adult Education, Walsall Works, NOVA, Junior Path, Steps to Work to identify and support children and young people into education, training or employment.
- The Impact Team work with young people aged 16 to 29 and the Transition and Leaving Care Services have a dedicated worker.
- In addition the Impact team also support young people with disabilities into education, training or employment. They are based in the Civic Centre.
- The Council has already offered apprenticeships for care experienced young people, including those with disabilities.
- Some young people with disabilities will need very specialised support such as nursing care and equipment to enable them to attend college safely and this requires us to work with other services such as health and adult services to achieve their aspirations.

Issue 2

How can Care Leavers be more supported into employment and training when a criminal mistake has been made during teenage years and now effects their future employment and training.

Response:

Young People are not automatically excluded from work or training on the basis of their convictions. Personal Advisor will in conjunction with the Impact Worker and Talent Match work with employers who will offer second chances to young people.

Additional support is also available such as a mentoring and coaching. There are a number of young people who have been successfully placed in apprenticeships and employment even though they have criminal conviction.

Care leavers are subject to the same range of restrictions in employment as any other young person. For example, a safeguarding conviction will restrict the ability to work with vulnerable adults and children.

Issue 3:

More support for young people to understand benefits. (This has been included in the local offer feedback). An example is Universal credits, the young people reported this is very hard to understand and get their head around. The young people would like a drop in specifically for benefits advice as this would help them and have a direct point of contact

Response:

In order to ensure that Personal Advisors can support young people to understand their benefits, all Personal Advisors work closely with and have received training about Universal Credit from the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP). Managers meet with the DWP regularly so we can work better for the benefit of our young people

We have named people to contact at the DWP and they have also have named staff at the Transition and Leaving Care Service that the DWP can contact so issues and difficulties can be sorted out quickly. We have a DWP Champion in the service.

The DWP has a daily duty service which we regularly use and they can support Young People or their Personal Advisors to resolve any issues.

The Council also has Welfare Rights Officers located in Money Home Job Service based at the Civic Centre who can offer support to young people. Access to advice and support can be secured directly by the young person or with the support of their Personal Advisors.

Issue 4:

The young people would like all professionals to attend The Respect Programme and for the professionals to recognise the importance of this training. (A new cohort of training is taking place for the young people to be trainers. New training dates for professionals TBC).

Response:

Elected Members and Senior Leaders recognise the importance of Respect Programme for range of professionals. In Children's Service the training is mandatory for all staff. Members and Senior Leaders have also been part of this training.

When the new pool of trainers have completed their training and further training dates are in place this will be extended to wider parts of the Council.

Issue 5:

The young people recognise housing as a wide issue therefore would like more support surrounding housing associations. The young people would like Housing Associations to understand 'what a care leaver goes through' and their need. 'Maybe be a bit more lenient and support around our struggles' or support with rent arrears if need be.

Response:

Children's Services and Money Home Job have a joint agreement about how we work together to meet our responsibilities in supporting care experienced young people to secure and keep their housing.

Walsall Council will allocate a Housing Officer to support young people seeking accommodation and provide priority banding for all care experienced young people.

We also work very closely with other housing associations and have good working relationships with Walsall Housing Group and Accord who are our main housing providers. They are very committed to working with young people and Personal Advisors to sort out any issues at earliest opportunity.

In addition, Personal Advisors will work with young people to ensure that they are supported and occasionally senior managers will become involved if this is required to resolve any issues.

Money Home Job will assist young people with their rent arrears as well as provide deposits to secure their tenancies when this is required.

We know that we need to do more to improve the support young people are offered and we are currently seeking feedback through the Local Offer Survey.

Issue 6:

Social Workers and PAs have timescales to work within however Care Leavers very often feel very much alone when approaching adulthood and moving into independence. Many young people have spoken about this subject of loneliness and isolation, which appears to be a recurring theme.

Response:

Care experienced young people often describe how independence brings both freedom and worries, particular problems young people experience are coping with loneliness and isolation. There a number of things we can do support young people.

- We will work with you to think about where you chose to live so you are closer to the people who support you.
- We will work with you to build your support network and friendships to reduce loneliness and isolation
- We will support you to keep in touch with members of your family or previous carers or re-establish family networks if required.
- We will help you to join activities so that you can make new friendships and support networks.
- The hub is open every week day and you are welcome to come in “chill and chat” and there is Personal Advisor on Duty to provide any immediate support and guidance.
- We have a group that meets fortnightly and we would encourage you to come along.
- We know that we need to be better at developing better ways to reduce isolation and loneliness.

Issue 7

Young people have requested to participate in new experiences, which would enhance their socialisation, self-esteem confidence, this would also help to attract new members, therefore would like a set budget

Response

The Children’s Champion is working with children looked after and care experienced young people to develop a range of activities and social events over the next 6 months this includes Excellence Night Out in October, Halloween party and Cultural festivals.

Some of the things we have so far this year has included tickets to watch football matches during the World Cup at Bescot Stadium, attending the Circus and the Pantomime.

We know that we need to do more and we are currently seeking feedback through the Local Offer Survey.