

Young People's 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

1.1 Total Respect Training

To date we have delivered 11 Total Respect courses to professionals in Walsall. We now have 6 care leavers trained and 2 children in care that deliver the course. The feedback that the attendees give to our young people continues to be positive which hopefully means they are making a great impression and that the pace and content of the course is good. The last couple of sessions we have had our two new recruits delivering. They really have impressed us during the planning and delivery stages of the training. They have been actively engaged in deciding what to deliver and how to deliver it within the session. They really have hit the ground running and add their own little bits of advice and reflections whilst training, this has added lots of value to the course. We have in total 7 staff trained to deliver Total Respect which is higher than many of our regional local authorities. We are proud of this programme and feel we have a good number of both young people and staff trained.

In terms of development we need to better improve the take up by staff of this training offer in 2023, Jenny Cockcroft Group Manager for Quality and Practice will be taking this forward with the senior leadership team to ensure greater buy in and commitment to this across the social care teams. It was asked at the last Corporate Parenting Panel about Elected Members attendance at this meeting, to date we don’t believe any have attended. As discussed it may be that we could offer bespoke training to members at a time more convenient to them whilst also enabling them to attend the whole day training if this is something that would want to be considered.

1.2 Council4Kids groups

The children in care have written the following, with the support of David and Sophia, to share with you what they have been working on for the last couple of months at children in care council.

“We have been asked for our ideas for the big event next year which the Virtual School arrange for Children In Care. We did an exercise to look at some of the positives and negatives of previous years and then had a think about what other ideas could be good, We came up with the following”....

Drayton Manor

Pro’s	Con’s
Get to go on loads of rides	It’s a long day
Free food	Travel time
Get to meet new people	Didn’t know about it
Make new friends	Some kids are scared of rides

Excellent night out

Pro’s	Con’s
Get to show your talent	Too nerve racking
Opportunity to perform in front of others	Too many people and not good for some kids that don’t like big crowds
Meet new people	Carers might not take us
Be around loads of children in care	Might be too far away

	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; padding: 5px;">Fun event to be part of</td> <td style="width: 50%;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Good to watch other people perform</td> <td></td> </tr> </table> <p>Ideas we like</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; padding: 5px;">Theme Park</td> <td style="width: 50%; padding: 5px;">Free food</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Big party with music</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">Bowling</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Go to the beach</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">Go on holiday</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;"></td> <td style="padding: 5px;"></td> </tr> </table> <p>We discussed bringing back a virtual group</p> <p>We had discussions about bringing back a virtual Council4Kids group. This is because different people like social workers and foster carers have asked David and Sophia how other young people can get involved if they don't live close to Walsall or if they just can't get here. We think it's a good idea but we still want to come here and meet up together because we are all friends.</p> <p>David and Sophia said that next year they will start the virtual group and we can join in if we want to. This could be a good way to meet other young people that don't come here and we think it's a good idea.</p>	Fun event to be part of		Good to watch other people perform		Theme Park	Free food	Big party with music	Bowling	Go to the beach	Go on holiday		
Fun event to be part of													
Good to watch other people perform													
Theme Park	Free food												
Big party with music	Bowling												
Go to the beach	Go on holiday												
1.3	Feedback from Care Leavers week												
	<p>Our care leavers gave us some feedback about the participation session we put on for them during care leavers week; they said the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ We enjoyed it and thought it went well ➤ It was nice to meet new people ➤ I liked meeting other care leavers from Walsall Council ➤ It was to have the chance to interact with managers and try and change things for all care leavers ➤ I felt my views were taken on board ➤ I met some nice people that I wouldn't have ever spoke to if I didn't attend the session <p>The young people were clear that they would like more opportunities moving forward to have this way of interacting with senior leaders and elected members. They very much appreciated and the venue and format of the session and felt more comfortable and relaxed in sharing what they wanted to be taken away from this and said they felt much more relaxed and able to voice their opinions. David is pulling together the learning from this event and the consultation with care leavers that was undertaken during care leavers week.</p>												
1.4	Children's home forum												
	<p>Since the last report we have been working on two specific things with the children in our residential homes.</p> <p>1- We have consulted with our young people to ask them on their ideas to name 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. They found this task tricky and told us it sounds easy but it's actually quite hard when it comes to it. Some names which they thought of were;</p>												

- The wish house
- The fun house
- Pine house
- Have a theme like 'Mountains'
- Treetops
- Tree House
- Tree Branch
- Branch Tree
- The Brambles
- Tree Log
- Log house

2- Toolkit for Social Workers and Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO's):

Our Independent Reviewing Officer service wanted us to consult with our young people on what they feel should be considered when a social worker or IRO visit them at their residential home. Some good and meaningful suggestions were made by our young people, here are the results of this interaction from early December as directly quoted from our young people:

- Would you like to go back into Foster Care? Young people should be supported with this if this is what they want early on and not just left at the residential home.
- Would you like anything to make you feel more at home? Things such as a new computer/ games console or games. This can help you socialise with others that live with you as well as with mates outside of the home.
- Ask if we feel comfortable living here.
- Is there anything we would like to change.
- What improvements could be made at the home for you and for others.
- Are you happy here or would you prefer to live in Foster Care.
- Always provide us with updates on things that you said you would do.
- Ask me what the best time to come out and see me is.
- Am I happy with the people in my life because sometimes there are too many professionals and I don't know what they keep wanting me to say.

Bluebells:

David and Sophia met with the manager Glen and the staff on the 1st of November to look at how we can get the voices of our young people that access this provision.

1st November meeting

Discussions with the staff were considering how best to go about this as some of the children there are non-verbal. We would not be able to simply ask the young people questions or get them to go through a form or an activity with us. Also, it is not the same children attending or sleeping over every week, there is usually some kind of rota basis.

	<p>In the past when different staff or professionals have been in this can disturb or upset the children's natural environment as they are not used to this and they benefit from my good, consistent routine.</p> <p><i>Some good discussions were held and ideas were generated which included....</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -David and Sophia going in to observe without getting too involved or interrupting the usual structure. -Talking to the children's key workers. -Calling up/having contact with parents to ask for their views and feedback. -In special schools they have what is called a PCP (Personal Centred Planning) meeting or process where this may get discussed. -Another good suggestion which would be applicable for Hilton Road and Redruth Road could be speaking to the Independent Visitor service as they have already got established relationships with young people and could ask for their feedback. <p>9th December visit to see young people-</p> <p>There were two teenagers at Bluebells when we undertook the visit. They were being cared for by two members of staff and the registered manager at the time. The one teenager was sitting in the sensory room and interacting with a tablet, he was really engaged in what he was doing. He was happy to say hello to me and shook my hand.</p> <p>The other teenager has some more complex physical needs and it is not as easy for people to interact with him. Although the staff again know him very well and can read his cues, they know what he likes and dislikes. It was a very pleasant visit to the home and it's clear that the staff who work there know the young people well and ensure the home runs very smoothly.</p>
	<p>Feedback forms for children who no longer have a social worker</p>
<p>1.5</p>	<p>The participation and quality assurance officers have been working together to create feedback forms to capture the experience of children and their families when the no longer have a social worker. The children in care council have helped to develop these forms and they will help us to better understand what our children and families experience of our service is and inform future planning. There are several forms which have been designed and are due to be rolled once they have been agreed by senior managers, with a plan of these going live in January 2023. The plan is to have a feedback form for children who were open to a social worker under child in need, child protection or as a child in our care but no longer has a social worker and is living with their family. A form for parents of these children has also been developed. Alongside this more targeted feedback forms have been developed for young people who are transitioning from care into the leaving care services and one final feedback form which is for young people when they cease have a Personal Advisor, for example when they turn 25 years old or determine they no longer wish to have a service. The Quality assurance officer will have oversight of this and will collate the findings on a bi-annual basis to inform our learning and development.</p>
<p>1.5</p>	<p>Christmas Celebrations</p>

This Christmas the children in care councils will be doing lots of Christmas crafts and having some festive fun! We will be making some Christmas goodies, eating some Christmas chocolates and watching a film with the whole group. On Tuesday the 20th of December we are taking a number of young people in care on a trip to the theatre to watch Aladdin in Wolverhampton. Our Care leaver Ambassador Sophia engaged with the theatre and was able to secure discounted tickets for the young people.

David Hughes
Children's Champion