

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 22nd March 2021, the young people have continued to meet virtually due to Covid-19. The report covers the period April to June 2021.

Reason for bringing to the Corporate Parenting Board:

To provide the Corporate Parenting Board an 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:

Previous reports.

Resource and legal considerations:

The Children in Care Council is supported by the Children’s Champion. They continue to meet twice per month and a flexible agenda is in place for each meeting agreed in partnership with the young people. Under the Participation and Engagement agenda in Walsall we are required to get young people involved in decision making and processes that directly affect their lives (Article 12 UNCRC). Article 12 says young people still have the human right to have opinions and for these opinions to be heard 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 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 virtual meetings will continue whilst restrictions remain in place. We have recently as of the end of May 2021 changed the days and frequency of the meetings in the hope we can reach a wider audience and for planning of face to face sessions. 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 (Transition Leaving Care) hub.

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 they have at times had to access education. The children's champion attends a variety of regional and national groups via Microsoft Teams or Zoom where we network with many different local authorities. Our virtual meetings in Walsall are proving to be very successful when comparing to other local authorities. Some local authorities have not managed to maintain any of the groups for care experienced young people whereas in Walsall we continue to have a consistent group as well as getting new referrals every month.

We continue to use WhatsApp 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 Children's Champion.

1.3 Key updates since March 2021

1. **New recruits to the CiCC:** Since the last Corporate Parenting Board we have had 4 new young people referred to take part in the CiCC meetings. The Children's Champion continues to meet with professionals to promote the CiCC across the service as we want every young person in Walsall to know we have a Children's Champion and a forum where their voices can be heard.
2. **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. Since Emma has moved on to work within Wolverhampton local authority the children's champion

has continued to work with Maria Kidd from the SEND team where further discussions are taking place as we seek to identify a SEND Champion. The purpose of this is to help further develop participation and the voice of the child within the SEND department working collaboratively with some of our most vulnerable children. The SEND team are also keen to have their own group of young people that access SEND support to help influence and shape their provision for children.

- 3. 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. The Children's Champion is looking into some recognised programmes such as ASDAN accredited awards where our CICC may have the opportunity to get a certificate for their hard work regarding their caring and nurturing nature as part of the forum.
- 4. Children's Homes:** The Children's Champion 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. The children's champion has now created a video to promote the CICC. The Children's Champion is also in regular contact with our residential home managers.
- 5. 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. However progress in this area is slow due to current ways of working.
- 6. Care Leavers Covenant:** David has met with Alex Latham who is our link to the Covenant. The meeting went ahead on 30th March 2021 where we reviewed the current offer within Walsall and to also consider the West Midlands combined offer. Alex delivered a very powerful presentation where lots of strategic people attended in order to consider developing our links with the covenant further as Walsall are a "trailblazer".
- 7. Care Leaver Ambassadors:** Plans are now in place to appoint a Care Leaver Ambassador to work alongside the Children's Champion. We are currently reviewing our finances within Corporate Parenting to ensure we can fully commit to this offer and considerations are taking place to look at either two part time positions or one full time position. The position/s will be explicitly for care experienced young people

within Walsall to help give them a chance to gain a Level 2 nationally recognised qualification as well as the experience of working for the local authority. In turn once the apprenticeship is completed we would be fully supporting them to continue to progress into full time employment. The Ambassadors will be managed by the Children's Champion and a good offer of nurture and support will be put in place for them.

8. **Maria's letter:** One of our mini influencers Maria, wrote a letter which she passed on to her social worker. The letter talked about Maria's passion to live in a "clean area", to "have the voice of young people heard" and also Maria's "passion and love for doing something about climate change to make the world a happier and healthier place to live". Following this letter being received our Director Colleen Male asked the Children's Champion to liaise with Dave Brown the Director for Place and Environment. A meeting took place on 9th of June at 4pm where Maria got to speak with Dave in person on Microsoft Teams. Maria has now been asked to take some pictures to highlight some of the issues as well as writing up some information and creating a blog. A litter picking event will be arranged coordinated through contacts through Dave whilst keeping Maria fully involved through each stage. Maria has been asked to be involved in creating a poster or material for the general public to help raise awareness as well as encouraging the school where Maria attends to become involved. Dave will also look to promote this positive work through publicising with local press.

Maria's letter:

Dear sir or madam

My name is Maria Ross and I'm 11 years of age I know that I am only young but I feel we as children are not getting heard. You may be wondering in what way, we feel we need more jobs doing to help the environment and for children's well being for example we could give each school a environment representative or get a committee to go out each day or weekend to pick up litter, also you could put more bins around the Area.

But I also feel that children like me are not getting heard in the way we are supposed to be well I think you should put more children's ideas into thought

I hope you put these ideas into consideration thank you

Yours sincerely Maria Ross

9. **Top Tips for professionals:** The CICC have decided to pull together some top tips on the best ways of interacting with young people in Walsall. This work is still underway and will be shared once complete.

10. **1-1 mentor residential home:** The CICC were approached to ask for some support for a 14 yr old at our Red Ruth residential home. One of our confident 19 year olds in the Influencers group was more than

happy to help out. This experience will also be fantastic to build on his skills as he drives forward his ambition of becoming a social worker.

11. The language we use: The CICC have been discussing some of their pet hates and their frustrations they experience. This is a piece of work that helps underpin our restorative ways of working which they are completing and will feed into the 'Top Tips'. As well as this the Children's Champion continues to discuss this important topic with teams during unit meetings to allow for reflection on practice.

12. Young Persons Agenda: Some of the CICC that have attended the Corporate Parenting Board meetings have asked how they can add things to the agenda, change the format of the meeting slightly and get involved with chairing. At the last Shadow Board in March 2021 this was acknowledged by the chair and it has been agreed that the chair and the vice chair will attend a CICC meeting to listen to some of their ideas. This is something they are looking forward to as they want to get the most out of these meetings. A date has been set for the chair to attend the CICC meeting which should be going ahead on the 17th of June.

13. Face to face/ group work: The Children's Champion has completed a risk assessment and discussed with his manager plans to start this group up again. Further meetings are now taking place with Public Health to ensure a full holistic planned approach is carried out taking into considerations everyone's safety and current national and local data on covid-19 and any new variant. But for now all of our young people show some real commitment by attending virtually which we are extremely grateful for.

14. Promotional video: The CICC have been discussing new ways to promote and reach all care experienced young people in Walsall. They have been involved in supporting the Children's Champion to create a catchy video which has now been sent out to corporate parenting and SFS (Safeguarding) teams. We have new videos planned for this year so please watch this space and keep checking your emails.

15. CICC meetings update: Our meetings which historically were every two weeks within a group setting still have to continue virtually. Young people recognise the difficulties that not connecting with their peers can have on their mental health and are keen to meet again face-to-face. The new plan for the meetings will take place every other Thursday on Microsoft Teams 16:30 – 17:15 for children aged 13 and under and 17:30 – 18:30 for children aged 14 and above.

1.4 Other news

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. We have some new

mini influencers on board now which will hopefully in the future be the next generation of care experienced young people attending the Shadow Board meetings. Some of our young adults have found employment or have other commitments with study and extracurricular activities, hobbies and sports so we are always on the look out to recruit my influencers.

1.5 Some recent feedback from our children and young people



1.6 Covenant: As a trailblazer for The Care Leavers Covenant we are committed to growing our invested partners. The Children's Champion arranged a review which took place on 30th March. We want to thank all of the managers and professionals that attended where some great discussion took place to further develop our local commitments and current signatories. Please do continue to spread the positive messages and encourage all young people age 16+ to sign up to the portal. For more information please contact the Children's Champion.

1.7 Participation Strategy: The Principle Social Worker in Walsall is in the process of putting together a Participation Strategy for Walsall. The CICC have been asked to get involved right from the start before the strategy is drawn up which will really make them feel valued and important. We have some plans to meet in June to discuss what Participation means to them and to find out what they think the strategy should include within our borough for all young people.

1.8 CICC Action Plan: The Children’s Champion and the Group Manager for Corporate Parenting are going to put a 12 month action plan together to help focus the CICC on some of their roles and responsibilities for them and for professionals as part of the CPB. This plan will be completed in collaboration with the children and young people and will be reviewed at regular intervals throughout the 12 month period to make sure it is fit for purpose.

1.9 Celebrations and achievements:

- ✓ A massive well done to two of our Influencers for being successful in gaining employment! New challenges and exciting times are ahead of you both so keep up the good work.
- ✓ A big thank you goes out to some of our social workers and personal advisers for continuing to promote the CICC and encouraging young people to find out more and to get involved.
- ✓ A big shout out and a special thanks to all of the young people that are committed to attending the CICC because without your willingness, passion and enthusiasm things would look very different in Walsall.

Dates for forthcoming events and children in care council meetings.

17th June - Event: Participation and Decision Making with Children and Young People in Care workshop <i>Dr Clive Diaz</i>
17th June 16:30 - 17:15 mini influencers and 17:30 - 18:30 influences
22nd June NLCBMF Participation Network Meeting
30th June 16:30 - 17:15 mini influencers and 17:30 - 18:30 influences
1st July CPB Corporate Parenting Board meeting, YP to attend Shadow Board
8th July Participation Steering Group chaired by Principle Social Worker
15th July 16:30 - 17:15 mini influencers and 17:30 - 18:30 influences
28th July Walsall residential homes planning meeting
29th July 16:30 - 17:15 mini influencers and 17:30 - 18:30 influences
2nd August Restorative Leads/ Champions meeting

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.

Sometimes we get too wrapped up in our processes and forget some of the basics like getting to know our children well, spending time with them and listening with the intent to understand their perspective not always to respond with solutions.

David Hughes
Children's Champion