

## **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 8<sup>th</sup> 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.

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## **Report: Young People's Engagement and Children in Care Council**

### **1.0 Introduction**

This report address the key actions and highlights since the last meeting of the last Corporate Parenting Board in January 2022.

### **1.1 Developing the look and feel of our Website**

During the development of the children's section of the council website the Children in Care Council (CiCC) and the Care Leavers group were encouraged to have their say.

They were consulted on what content should go on there and how this should look. There were some limitations to what was possible but some things which our groups suggested were:

- Having a 'Blog page' where stories and information can be updated regularly
- Pictures to be added not just writing
- Information on the CiCC and Care Leavers group to be present

The Childrens Champion and Care Leaver Ambassador have shared these views and so far our young people are pleased with the information which is now live for them to access.

We have also gathered the views of some Foster Carers who like the information that is on the website. They feel the children's section is easily accessible.

### **1.2 Care leavers App**

Following the discussion held at the last Board meeting we have undertaken in further consultation with our care leavers. Our care leavers have met with one of the providers for an App. Following this session we have collated some of their feedback both in person as well as through our virtual platform using Mentimeter.

There has very little interest from our care leavers wanting us to provide them with an App. They feel that they do like being able to look for themselves and read things in their own time but ultimately they all prefer to ask their Personal Advisor for support and signposting when required. Having Apps on your phone is a good way to socialise and keep in touch with friends e.g. Whatsapp or Snapchat and these apps are far more advanced and interactive than any care leaver app we have seen to date.

*"We do like to be informed and like to access information but having this on an app would make us feel more excluded as opposed to included which is what we have experienced for many years. "*

*"We would all appreciate the website being updated regularly" and can go on there if we need information that our PA's cannot provide. "*

At this point the feedback from our care leavers is asking us to focus on ensuring that our website is would be a key source of information and the support of their Personal Advisors.

### 1.3 **Involving our Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers**

We are starting to contact our children and young people who are Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children to seek their views about how they wish to be involved in the activities of the Children in Care Council and Care Leaver's Forum. There are currently 13 young people aged 16 and 17 years and over 30 young people aged between 18 and 23 years. Many of our young people live in Walsall and in neighbouring Local Authorities and are from a range of backgrounds.

In order to ensure that we are capturing their views we will need to work with their Personal Advisors and interpreters to engage their views meaningfully and consider the best way to involve them in the range of participation activities and forums.

### 1.4 **Total Respect Training**

*Total Respect training is run by children in care and care leavers (in partnership with staff). This training provides a valuable insight into the lives of children in care and care leavers.*

Total Respect training was relaunched this year and our first course was delivered on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2022 by David Hughes, Sophia Begum, Billy and Dean who are two of our care leavers. We had 15 people booked on the course of which 7 attended. Although we expected more to attend the training, in some ways this was good as it helped settle Billy and Dean's nerves. Billy and Dean did such a wonderful job, were super confident and delivered the session in a really professional way. Here are some comments we have received:

*-Fab training, really thought provoking.*

*-I have taken lots away from the training, it's great that you get young people involved to share things from their perspective.*

*-I really enjoyed the interactive tasks involved, this will stick with me for a long time.*

### 1.5 **Promotion through Foster Carers Newsletter**

Lashone Richards is a Mockingbird Hub Foster Carer. She volunteers her time to help support the CiCC and Care Leavers Group and attends all of our sessions. She brings young people with her and always gives them a lift home too and we are always grateful of her support. Through our joint working with Lashone she has helped us promote our success stories and the work we do within our groups.

In February 2022 we had our first appearance in the Foster Carers Newsletter through 'Walsall Fostering Service Newsletter'. We are very grateful and see this as a fantastic opportunity to promote the group and we hope to get some new recruits as part of this.

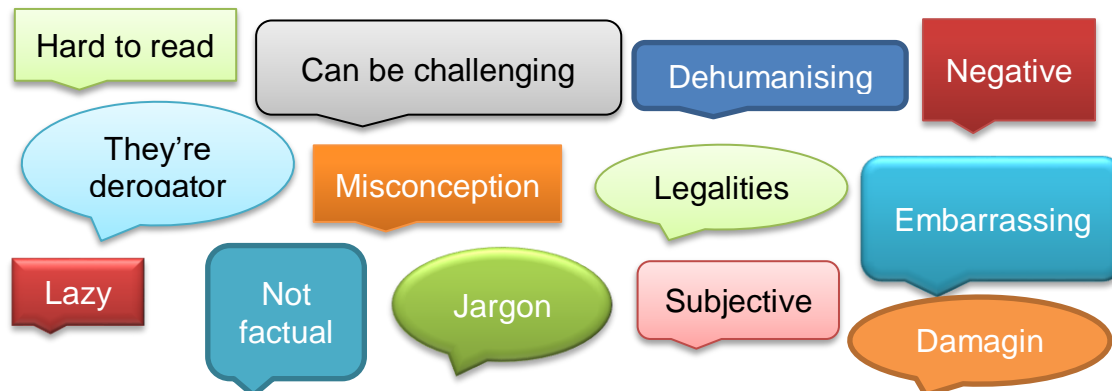
## 1.6 Caring language

We have started to review the language we use to describe our interactions with our children and young people. We have undertaken both face to face consultation as well as sought views of children, young people and their carers via Mentimeter which is a virtual tool to collate anonymous views.

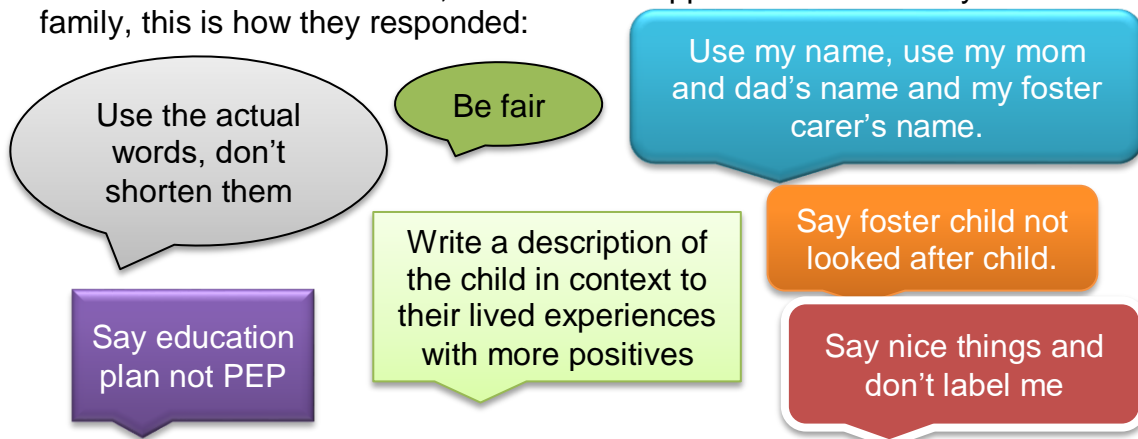
In the first phase of our consultation we have considered the words that our children and young people have said that they don't like.

<i>Case load</i>	<i>Service users</i>	<i>Intervention</i>
<i>Support plan</i>	<i>Support package</i>	<i>Safeguarding</i>
<i>Child offloading their concerns</i>	<i>Case</i>	<i>Access to their files</i>
<i>Placement</i>	<i>LAC</i>	<i>LAC Review</i>
<i>Transitions – Entering Adulthood</i>	<i>Respite</i>	<i>Challenging behaviour</i>
<i>PEP</i>	<i>Difficult to place</i>	<i>Hard to/ will not engage</i>
<i>Pupil Premium</i>	<i>Foster Carer</i>	<i>SGO</i>
<i>Contact</i>	<i>Contact centre</i>	<i>Referral</i>
<i>Efficiency savings</i>	<i>IRO</i>	<i>Putting themselves at risk</i>
<i>Case file</i>	<i>CAMHS</i>	<i>PEP</i>

The feedback received via the Mentimeter set out below is what they think of them and how they make them feel:



Then we asked what our young people would prefer for professionals to say instead of the words above, some were supported to do this by their foster family, this is how they responded:



### **Conclusion and recommendations:**

This project has been a big piece of work and the intended purpose is to give children a voice. As we know nationally that children in care are faced with many processes, meetings and professionals, so having their say on the words which we say and record on their records is an important and empowering thing to be part of.

What we would like to see happen next is that these views and suggestions are taken on board by all professionals no matter which department they work in are saying and recording caring language that is easy for everyone to understand and access.

We now aim to work in partnership with *Practice and Partnership Development* where we will set up a steering group of young people and professionals to help drive forward some positive changes. One of the first things we aim to do in Walsall is to change some key words so we have made a start by selecting 10 of the most recurrent words highlighted during our consultation.

These words are:

1. LAC
2. Case Load
3. Placement
4. Respite
5. Contact
6. Referral
7. Putting themselves at risk
8. Service users
9. PEP
10. Challenging behaviour

With the support from all staff and managers we believe that we can make a big difference to all children involved with professional services. It's not just about banning words but changing the culture within the professional arena.

We seek to focus on these 10 words across the Council which we communicate across the whole service and partners and that we all give a commitment to stop using. We will then 'call people in' if the use one of the 10 words to challenge in a strength based and restorative way. .

#### **1.7 Free Leisure pass**

The Children's Champion received an email from a care leaver in March asking for some support to be able to access her local gym, fitness and swimming facilities. As part of our Local Offer to Care Leavers they all get a free subscription for our Active Living Centres within Walsall and run by the Council. This young lady however lives out of borough and therefore was not able to access a gym in Walsall. David managed to secure provision for this particular young person through our regional participation group.

**One thing we would like the Board to consider is a regional agreement across all 14 Local Authorities for access to leisure via the West Midlands Combined Authority.**

### 1.8 **Good news stories**

Big shout out to one of our committed care leavers Jordan. In March Jordan was successful in gaining employment and is enjoying his new chapter in adult life. Despite this he is still committed to the group and the work we do so will remain involved in our meetings and projects. We are all really proud of Jordan and grateful for the support and commitment he has given to both the Children In Care Council and the Care leavers group. One thing Jordan has requested is a lanyard and maybe an ID badge. He loves getting involved and is happy to support our groups and has asked if we can provide him with one. I told Jordan I will bring this to the board.

### 1.9 **Independent Living Skills**

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2022 our Care Leavers group welcomed two managers from Transition and Leaving Care service. They talked about providing some workshops for care leavers to cover a range of topics such as; managing money, how to set up your bills and manage them, cooking skills, using household appliances, education employment and training and things related to this. Our care leavers provided the following feedback:

*"I think it's a good idea."*

*"Moving out and living on your own may be scary so this is a great idea."*

*"If this group was set up I think I would attend."*

*"This would be good so I could meet some other care leavers and make some new friends."*

*"I didn't realise there was so much to pay for when you move out. I think this group would help."*

*"I'm not sure if I would attend, but I think it's really good idea and other care leavers might want to attend."*

*"If this group would have been around when I left care then I think it would have really helped me."*

*"I like coming to the TLC hub so having these meetings would be good as it means I could come here more often."*

*"I like the idea of getting to know more staff so I wouldn't have to just rely on my PA."*

*"It sounds good but I'm not sure if I would come along."*

*"Transport could be an issue for some care leavers."*

### 1.10 **Virtual Care Leavers Group**

We launched our additional care leavers group on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March but on this occasion nobody joined in the Teams call. We will continue to promote this virtual group through our Transition Leaving Care service and ask the Personal Advisors to pass on the details and encourage attendance.

#### 1.11 Other news

- Our care leavers have supported different departments with two interview panels in March.
- Thank you to the Virtual School for sending a representative to speak to the CiCC in person on the 10<sup>th</sup> March 2022

#### 1.12 Dates for the diary

##### **Council 4 Kids group dates:**

This group continues to be held once every other week. The members of our group welcome guest speaker and are happy for managers or elected members to pop along and say hello if they wish.

##### **Care Leavers Group:**

Our care leavers group continues to meet twice per month. We run one face to face session per month and one virtual session. Our care leavers are happy to see guest speakers at their meetings and would be happy for any managers or elected members to pop into their meetings if they wish.

**David Hughes**  
**Children's Champion**