

Report of the Strategic Director of Children's Services to the meeting of Corporate Parenting Panel to be held on 13 September 2017.

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Subject:

The Children in Care Council

Summary statement:

Report to explain the legislative background to Children in Care Councils.

Bradford's Children in Care Council Model: How it functions, how it is supported by Officers and the outcomes for children/young people involved.

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Portfolio:

Children's Services

Overview & Scrutiny Area:

Children's Services

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report will explain the legislative background to Children in Care Councils and will look at Bradford's Children in Care Council Model; how it functions, how it is supported by Officers and the outcomes for children/young people involved.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Government's Care Matters Green and White papers (2006 and 2007 respectively) set out a range of proposals for local authorities to improve outcomes for children in care and care leavers, including a proposal for all local authorities to set up 'Children in Care Councils' (CiCC) to increase the voice of children and young people in care in order to influence and shape the services that they receive. The Government's 2007 Care Matters White Paper states: Whatever structures exist in a children's services authority, children's participation is an essential part of the process. We expect every local authority to establish a children in care council to ensure that every child has the opportunity to air their views. In making these arrangements, the local authority should consider in particular the needs of disabled children and very young children, and of those children who are not members of the council themselves. Through the children in care council, children and young people should be able to put their experiences of the care system directly to those responsible for corporate parenting including the Director of Children's Services and Lead Member, who should demonstrate how they will maintain contact with children and young people in care. Government subsequently requested, through statutory guidance, that directors of children's services and lead members for children's services attend children in care council meetings on a regular basis to identify how their services and support can be improved through directly communicating with children in care.
- 2.2 A review of legislation, policy and research identifies the foundations of CiCC's as an effective mechanism for promoting effective participation of children in care and care leavers in decision-making about their care.
- 2.3 This foundational structure of participation for children and young people in and leaving care combines the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the Children Act 1989, Children Act 2004 and Care Matters: Time for Change White Paper, including the Pledge for children in care and care leavers.
- 2.4 This framework recognises the importance of care children and young people exercising influence over decisions about services that affect them as involved local citizens.
- 2.5 Some decisions by local authorities impact on the lives of children in care and care leavers in a very distinct and particular way. This can be very different from those decisions that impact on non-looked after children. Therefore there is a very compelling case for these dedicated models of participation when decision-making for children in care and care leavers. These should reflect their unique interest in decisions about, for example, leaving care protocols, the commissioning of foster and residential placements or legal and policy developments in care.

- 2.6 The participation of children in care and care leavers reflects a broader public policy emphasis on public service providers facilitating increased local determination by local citizens, in decisions about their services and the personalisation agenda that has developed in adult social care and health.
- 2.7 There has been growing evidence that decisions about services produce better outcomes when made closer to the individuals and groups who are users of those services. Those outcomes are generally of a more positive experience of the service, but also a more effective result for the user, and consequently produce value for money in a reduced need for repeat use of services or, potentially, other services. In that respect, children in care councils provide an effective mechanism for children in care and care leavers as a distinct user group with niche needs to shape the services they receive.
- 2.8 CiCC's were seen as reflecting the local council in that members of the local CiCC acted as representatives for the wider care population.
- 2.9 The CiCC as representatives in a representative democracy model rely upon the input of the wider care population through a variety of mechanisms including viewpoint, Ofsted reports, the IRO annual report, complaints and direct representation/consultation from other care children/young people.
- 2.10 As a representative democracy model we have observed over the years that they act most effectively with a membership of around 10 sitting on the council at any time. Increases over that number (even up to 18) have resulted in a decreased effectiveness.
- 2.11 The secret to the participation of children/young people in the CiCC model is not to increase the attendance at the CiCC but to increase the hard data they receive from those children/young people in care and after care.
- 2.12 "Young people from the Children in Care Council should be able to attend and play a full part in Corporate Parenting Boards and other fora. This represents the most influential role that young people can take. It does, however, present enormous challenges if young people's presence and involvement is not to be tokenistic and led by an adult agenda. It is important to ensure that the structures and ways of working are appropriate to young people having their voice heard. Traditional adult meeting formats are probably not the best way of involving young people. There are many ways in which structures and ways of working have been designed to overcome the problems of young people's views being marginalised. In many local authorities young people have taken control of the whole or part of meetings, meetings have been held at venues more accessible to young people and corporate parents have become mentors to young people members of the Children in Care Council. Elected members may need training to understand the concerns of young people and to be able to communicate effectively. In some authorities elected members have received Total Respect or other equivalent training. Contact between young people and elected members and senior managers should not be limited to formal meetings. Corporate parents should be encouraged to attend full meetings of the Children in Care Council, attend consultation and activity days and visit young people where they live".

3. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

3.1 The Bradford CiCC model:

- Bradford's CiCC has approximately 8 to 10 active regular members at this time. It meets weekly at Culture Fusion from 5pm to 7pm. Business is dealt with from 5.30pm to 6.45pm.
- The CiCC members receive refreshments and travel money.
- The CiCC has made its own policies and procedures for its day to day running and how it takes on individual pieces of work for the Local Authority and out side agencies.
- The CiCC is autonomous in its decision making apparatus. It decides its own rules and its own penalties for the infringement of those rules. These rules and the penalties have been negotiated with the Officer requested to coordinate the council to ensure they are fair and within legislative requirements.
- The CiCC vote on issues or decisions when appropriate. A clear majority is needed to pass any decision or take any action forward.
- All young people who attend can vote. The Officer/Co-ordinator has no vote but is often asked for further information, clarification or advice.

3.2 The role of the Officer/Co-ordinator is to collect and collate the information that the CiCC requires e.g. when in discussion about a specific issue with community homes he was requested to collect the community home regulations and then present them in a young person friendly format to the whole council.

It is also the Co-ordinators role to capture children/young people's voices through viewpoint, etc. and to explore new methods of collecting the voices of children and young people in the care arena.

The Co-ordinator is also required to arrange any consultations, training, information exchanges or interview panels etc., ensuring that venues are booked, young people are transported and available, and all research and preparation is completed.

The Co-ordinator acts as a organisational conduit between the children/young people and the professionals/agencies that require their services e.g. when an interview panel is requested the Co-ordinator organises the venue, obtains and explains the job spec, coordinates the panel's creation of questions and a scoring matrix, and sometimes presents a written report feeding back the panel's views to the managers/organisations that requested the panel.

3.3 At the moment the CiCC undertake a number of ongoing tasks including; interview panels, consultations, facilitating and presenting foster parent training, new social worker induction, presenting information on service user perspectives to students studying social work at Bradford University, coordinating and evaluating student's presentations on service user's perspectives for Dr Warren at Bradford University.

- 3.4 Young people's panels; the young people received training in recruitment and selection. They are expected to understand the roles and responsibilities of the posts being interviewed for. They are expected to formulate questions for the candidates based upon the job specifications and any representations/concerns that they have over the role. They also create a scoring matrix for the questions. The panel are expected to keep extensive notes on each candidate and feedback extensively. The feedback is either to the Co-ordinator or the commissioner of the panel.

The young people's panels have been very successful and all the feedback on their performance has been positive. We have regular panels booked on a monthly basis.

- 3.5 Fostering training; the young people formulated a training programme for foster carers. They developed a short video to be used in this training. The young people deliver this full day training to every cohort of new foster carers. Some of the training is quite challenging for new foster carers however this training has been extremely successful and is valued by both our fostering colleagues and the new foster parents. We have five training sessions booked this year.

- 3.6 University training; the young people offer three different services to Bradford university social work department and the social care degree course.

They speak directly to the students presenting their experiences of care, their expectations of good practice and their critique of bad practice. They are involved directly with the student's presentations, offering a service users perspective and experience in the formulation and presentation. The young people then sit on the evaluation panel helping to mark the final presentations for the service user's perspectives module. The feedback from Bradford University has been very positive and they have expressed a desire for this to continue. We have four sessions booked this year.

- 3.7 Social Worker induction; this is a fairly new addition to the CiCC's tasks. It has been agreed between the principal Social Worker, the Coordinator and the CiCC that all new Social Workers meet with the young people as part of their induction. This is an informal session where the young people offer their perspectives on what makes a good Social Worker and obversely what makes a poor social worker. The number of sessions will be dependent on how many new cohorts of Social Workers we welcome to the authority.

- 3.8 Consultations; the CiCC are regularly asked to consider new plans, new services, service developments and external services for young people. They undertake these consultations on a regular basis.

- 3.9 Future Developments; the CiCC are developing their services to increase participation across the care arena and thereby increase their effectiveness as representatives of the care/care leaver population.

3.10 The Coordinator is currently working with the Service Manager for community homes to examine how we can increase the participation of community home residents. We are looking at new ways of effectively utilising residents meetings and key work sessions to directly feed the residents voices to their representatives. We are also looking at how to capture that hard data and evidence it effectively. One avenue of exploration is the possibility of training young people who have left care in the community home standards, group work, child protection and keeping records. The Coordinator has already received five referrals for young people who would be appropriate and willing to undertake such a role. We would then envisage those young people facilitating residents meetings and/or meeting with residents on a one to one basis to record their concerns/observations on our services. This would include a pro forma with clear dates of any action taken on issues raised. This could be overseen by the Service Manager and the Coordinator to feed back to both the CiCC and the community Home Managers to elicit a clear and transparent process of participation.

3.11 With the residents of community homes who are younger e.g. 12 and below, we are exploring appropriate alternative models to increase participation. The Coordinator is meeting with managers, practitioners and attending residents meetings to establish how we can record, act upon and evidence the participation that is already embedded in everyday service delivery. We are also examining how residents meetings can be improved to show clear evidence of children's voices being recorded and acted upon. The former Manager of Meadowlea which received an outstanding mark from Ofsted is proving invaluable in formulating models for the participation of younger residents.

The Coordinator has already mooted these ideas to the new Service Manager of Fostering. The Coordinator and Service Manager plan on exploring similar themes and developments in the fostering service. We are just waiting for the Service Manager to take up her post.

3.12 The CiCC have undertaken a commitment to establish regular attendance at regional and national meetings and events for CiCC and participation including the National Care Leavers Bench Marking forum. This will enable them to share models of good practice and new ideas to elicit greater participation.

3.13 The CiCC have also expressed an interest in evaluating services at the point of contact by organising a secret shopper model of evaluations for services to children and young people. This would entail young people making contact with various services e.g. Duty at Leaving Care, to evaluate how service user friendly they are, how accessible and how effective. This could be used as valuable feedback to improve our services to children/young people.

3.14 The CiCC have also expressed an interest in receiving training and information on radicalisation and extremism and the have set the Coordinator the task of exploring how they can implement this. The Coordinator has established local connections with national organisations offering training in this arena. The Co-ordinator is now looking at the feasibility of incorporating such a programme with the possibility of young people offering cascade training to their peers.

- 3.15 The Co-ordinator has also been requested to attend the new life story work development forum with a view to developing life story work. The CiCC will be involved and consulted during this process.
- 3.16 The next step for future developments; all the developments listed have cost implications. Not least that young people need to be reimbursed for their time and travel. As we increase participation and training we also increase the time and travel of participants. Our next step is to cost all these developments over a twelve month period and assess feasibility. As part of this strategy the CiCC have requested oversight of their budget. In practical terms this means a budget meeting with the Coordinator every three months where they can see what has been spent and plan accordingly for future expenditure.
- 3.17 Outcomes for young people; the young people garner a multitude of experiences and skills from involvement with the CiCC. They learn how to negotiate, how to argue the point and not the person, how to express themselves confidently in a variety of different arenas (from weekly meetings to meetings with Directors and Elected Members) they are offered training in recruitment and selection. They can directly affect the services they use and thereby feel empowered and invested in local services.

They get to meet a variety of people, interview them, consult with them and negotiate with them. They learn confidence in their own intellectual musculature. They make new friends. They learn about democracy and how it works. They receive briefings and information sessions on a wide variety of subjects and have a safe space to explore them.

The CiCC have had young people go on expeditions to the Sinai desert, Iceland and half way across the Far East.

We have attended regional and national events on care where they have shared opinions and experiences with children/young people from all over the U.K. They have met with M.P's, all party parliamentary groups and the Children's Commissioner. They have taken part in ground breaking academic research including just recently by the University of East Anglia on Children and Young People in Care who identify as LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Questioning)

Not least one ex-CiCC member has now completed a level three apprenticeship and is now successfully employed as a full time residential practitioner in our Local Authority.

4. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL

- 4.1 There are no financial issues arising from this report.

5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

5.1 There are no risks or governance issues arising out of this report.

6. LEGAL APPRAISAL

6.1 There are no legal issues arising from this report.

7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

7.1 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY

None.

7.2 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

None.

7.3 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACTS

None.

7.4 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

None.

7.5 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

None.

7.6 TRADE UNION

None.

7.7 WARD IMPLICATIONS

None.

8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS

None.

9. OPTIONS

None.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 That Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel note the content of this report.

11. APPENDICES

None.

12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

12.1 Children in Care Councils: A London Picture. October 2010.

12.2 A Guide To Good Practice In The Structure and Running of Children in Care Councils. NCB 2016.