

Report of the Strategic Director of Childrens Services to the meeting of the Corporate Parenting panel to be held on 20th Jan 2020

Subject:

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Childrens Participation Report - December 2019
Viewpoint – What are young people telling us?

Summary statement:

This report presents the importance and different types of child participation within children looked after reviews. There is specific emphasis on the use of viewpoint as a tool for child participation with Bradford’s children.

This report explains how viewpoint fits in with other types of participation as well as cover performance of completed questionnaire and what Bradford children are telling us through the completion of viewpoint.

There is also information on Bradford’s viewpoint user-group, its functioning and findings.

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Overview & Scrutiny Area:

Children’s Services

1. SUMMARY

1.1 This report presents what Bradford children are telling us through the completion of viewpoint.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Participation

Participation has been found to help children and young people to:

- Feel connected to and committed to decisions.
- Have better decision-making and service tailoring.
- Feel empowered and more in control.
- Increase self-esteem and enhance their ability to manage stressful experiences.
- Be more *adequately prepared* for life events like leaving care.
- Be more protected and safeguarded.

2.2 Participation & Voice of the Child in Reviews (LAC age 4+)

The two tables below present the different ways Bradford's children have participated in their Looked after Reviews since April 2018 to present.

1 April 2018 – 31 March 2019

Participation Type	Total no of CLA	Percentage %
PN1 Child attended & spoke for self	924	39.61%
PN2 Child attended - advocate spoke	13	0.56%
PN3 Child attended - gave views non verbally	9	0.39%
PN4 Child attended without contributing	11	0.47%
PN5 Child not attended, advocate briefed with views	210	9.00%
PN6 Child not attended, views sent	1154	49.46%
PN7 Child not attended & did not send views	12	0.51%
Total Reviews with children age 4+	2333	
Participation Rate	99.5%	

1 April 2019 – 30 November 2019

Participation Type	Total no of CLA	Percentage %
PN1 Child attended & spoke for self	686	41.80%
PN2 Child attended - advocate spoke	7	0.43%
PN3 Child attended - gave views non verbally	9	0.55%
PN4 Child attended without contributing	3	0.18%
PN5 Child not attended, advocate briefed with views	136	8.29%
PN6 Child not attended, views sent	793	48.32%
PN7 Child not attended & did not send views	7	0.43%
Total Reviews with children age 4+	1641	
Participation Rate	99.6%	

Bradford has consistently maintained a performance of 99% or above for children participating in their reviews. From the above tables we can see that over the last financial year 924 children attended their review meeting and spoke for themselves. This makes up 40% of all participation which has been consistent over the last 2 years and has improved slightly to 41% this financial year.

The second most popular form of participation is code PN6 where children do not attend the meeting but send views via the social worker, foster carer, and advocate or by completing some paper consultation form such as Viewpoint.

2.3 What is Viewpoint?

Viewpoint Interactive is a computer based tool used widely by local authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland since 1995 for obtaining the views of children and young people for many uses including preparation for their Children Looked after reviews.

Children and young people using Viewpoint can do so via the internet or a laptop computer using a unique login ID allocated to them. They complete a questionnaire interactively and a report is then produced for their CLA review. There are also some computer games children can play within the questionnaire.

Prior to each CLA Review, the parent, carer and child subject of the review are asked for their views on how the placement is going and whether there are any issues for the review to consider. This is done via manual Consultation Papers to parents and carers, and the completion of the Viewpoint on-line questionnaire by the child.

All our CLA & Child Protection population age range 4 – 18 can complete viewpoint. The questionnaires are available from the second CLA review.

Young people have been involved in revising the questionnaires to ensure the content is appropriate to their needs whilst supporting delivery of service. This was last done in November 2018.

The IRO will check the questionnaire to identify any themes the child/young person would like to discuss either at the meeting or any reservations they may have regarding their current episode of care or life at home. It is not uncommon for an IRO to visit the child before the meeting if they have come across an issue raised by the child within the completed questionnaire.

2.4 The Child's Voice and Viewpoint

Viewpoint is one of many ways a child can participate in their review and ensure that their voice is heard. The benefits of completing the questionnaire include answering questions on a wide range of issues which are very important for children in care. This includes things such as the child's feelings about their home, relationship with their carer, relationship with their social worker, family contact, things that they are happy or unhappy about and things they would like to change etc.

Completed questionnaires are also used to inform sufficiency reports to identify what Bradford's children are telling us. Currently these sufficiency reports are prepared on a quarterly basis within the year.

Some of the key messages are as follows:

Sufficiency Report January-March 2019

Age range 4 to 6 (based on 11 completed questionnaires)

- Most children felt safe where they lived.
- Most children reported feeling happy where they lived and helped by their carers.
- Most children reported being able to speak to their social worker. Some said that they wanted more time with their social worker and didn't know what their placement plan was.
- Most children said that they slept well and some children said that they often got upset.
- Most children said they attended school every day, were happy there and that their carers help them with homework.
- Some children said they wanted more contact with their families and that their friends could not visit them at home.
- Most children said they receive pocket money and some said that they would like more life story work.

So following from obtaining these views the sufficiency reports make recommendations on areas professionals working with the children can focus on such as:

- Professionals to explore more contact with identified family and friends.
- To complete life story work.
- To capture individual experiences of school life.
- To explore what makes children feel safe and settled.

Sufficiency Report January-March 2019

Age range 10 to 15 (52 completed)

This is Bradford's most successful age range for completing questionnaires. Some of the findings are as follows:

- Most young people did not report feeling bullied where they live.
- Most young people reported positive relationship with their carers.
- Some young people reported that it is not always easy to speak to their carer's and professional advice was for the allocate social worker to explore communication between the child and the carer.
- Some young people requested to have more time with their social worker and to be informed on how long they would remain in placement
- Most young people said that they did not have any health worries but some reported being unaware of whether or not they had had their annual health assessment.
- Most young people said that they had space to do homework and were assisted by their carer
- Similar to the younger age range, some young people said that they would want more contact with their family.
- Most young people reported that they could practice their religion and customs. They had personal care items and were given a choice about the clothes they wish to wear.

Sufficiency Report April to June 2019

Age range 7-9 (based on 20 completed questionnaires)

- Most children reported feeling safe where they lived and knowing where to go for help.
- Some children said they didn't always like what they had to eat.
- Most liked where they lived and had a good relationship with the carer.
- Some children reported not always feeling comfortable talking to their social worker.
- Some children reported not sleeping well and often being upset.
- Most children reported going to school every day. Some said they did not enjoy school and wanted more help with homework.
- Some children wanted most life story work and more pocket money.

Sufficiency Report April to June 2019

Age range 10 to 15 (based on 44 completed questionnaires)

- Most young people reported feeling safe where they live.
- Some young people reported being bullied where they lived and had been reported missing to the police. Issues were addressed by the IRO within the review.
- Most young people felt happy where they lived and reported a good relationship with their carer.
- Some young people wanted to spend more time and requested more help from their social worker.
- Most young people were happy with family contact.
- Some young people said their friends couldn't visit them and wanted more family contact.
- Like the previous sufficiency report within this age range most young people said that they could follow their religion and customs. They had enough personal care

- items and were allowed to choose their own clothes.
- Some young people said they wanted more life story work.

Sufficiency report July -September 2019

Age range 10-15 (based on 30 complete questionnaires)

- Most young people reported having an annual health assessment.
- Most young people said that they were not worried about their health.
- Most young people said that they are not worried by anything at school. Six children were nearly always worried about something at school. This was mostly around homework and exams.
- Over 70% of the children reported that their carer helps them with homework.
- Most children reported having the equipment and space to do homework.
- Children reported undertaking a wide variety of activities. The most popular mentioned were meals out, going to the theatre or cinema and sports and leisure activities. The biggest obstacle mentioned to being involved in more activities was cost.
- Most young people report enjoying the food they were given.
- Most young people again report being able to practice their religion and customs. Once again, almost all the children report having enough personal care items.

2.5 IRO and Viewpoint

The sufficiency reporting has been able to provide an overview of specific children who have raised a concern with regards to their care experience. These have been discussed with the IRO, focusing on firstly whether they were aware of the issues, what action they took and the outcome.

Between January and March 2019, I reviewed over 20 children's questionnaires with Bradford's IRO's around being safe, the child's emotional, well-being and the child's relationship with their social worker.

Here are some examples of issues identified and resolutions completed -

- One boy told his IRO that he was scared of a new child that had recently come to stay in the residential unit. The IRO communicated this to the relevant residential workers. Reassurance and protective measures were then adhered to, under the unit's bullying protocol. The outcome was when the IRO then touched base with the child he was much happier, appreciative and thankful.
- Another young boy told his IRO that he was scared of various strangers attending the next-door neighbour's house. The IRO reported the matter to the police who confirmed that there was suspected drug dealing taking place.
- A sibling group reported that they were not happy at their placement. When the IRO spoke to them, they clearly wanted to go home. Subsequently the children have returned home to live with their mother under a Supervision Order. This evidenced key professionals working together effectively on the voice of children.
- A young girl reported being unhappy. When the IRO spoke to her, it was made apparent that this was regarding family contact. Following the review it was agreed that contact would be reduced which resolved matters for her.

- A child reported a poor relationship with their social worker. When this was explored it became apparent that the child was blaming the social worker for not being home. The child accepted that the social worker was only doing their job.
- A child requested that their social worker ensures their mother did not attend the review. This was addressed and achieved.
- Another child reported a poor relationship with their social worker. That social worker has since left the authority. The child now told the IRO that they are getting on much better with their new worker.
- A recommendation was made by the IRO for the social worker to do some meaningful direct work as the child felt they were not involved in care planning.
- Another child told the IRO that even though they reported that friends could not visit them in placement they understood this was due to the distance and not as a result of anything the carer, social worker had not done.
- A young boy confirmed that he misunderstood the question and that his friends actually could visit him in placement.

To encourage better performance, it was agreed in July 2019 that IRO's would support children to complete viewpoint when visiting them. I am aware that this practice is being embedded across the service.

2.7 Performance

Viewpoint Completed Questionnaires 1 April 2018 – 31 March 2019

Over the last financial year 310 questionnaires were completed by Bradford's children looked after population. This presents a reduction on previous years where numbers have been closer to 400. The number of completed questionnaires in 2017 to 2018 was 381. The most engaged age range is 10 to 15 with 16+ still being an area where engagement is slow.

Age Range	Completed
4-6	35
7-9	73
10-15	179
16 plus	23
Total	310

Since April 2019, completion rates have been similar to the previous financial year. If the current trend continues we expect 346 questionnaires to be completed over the full 12 months. This would be an improvement and increase on last year of 36.

1 April 2019 – 30 November 2019

Age Range	Completed
4-6	24
7-9	47
10-15	119
16 plus	23
Total	213

2.8 Viewpoint User group

The viewpoint user group continues to meet every 3 months. The group is made up of Bradford's participation lead worker and champions representing different parts of the service. The group has faced some challenges over the last year to ensure regular consistent attendance from key professionals. The main issue has been staff-churn within the frontline social workers and team managers.

The user group has attempted to identify the reasons for the decline in viewpoint performance over the last few years. Primarily we identified the reasons as follows:

- No automatic reminder system in place.
- Team managers and social workers on the frontline and through care service have not been effectively driving viewpoint performance.
- Alternative methods being used when undertaking direct work with children and acquiring the voice of the child. This includes using signs of safety tools for children subject to child protection plans and also the pilot of the leaving well for 16+ CLA and care leavers.
- Completion of questionnaires has not been a priority within social work supervision.
- It has been difficult to achieve consistency with attendance at the user group due to people leaving and new people coming in to the service.
- One of Bradford's workforce development staff recently reported that a number of foster carers in Bradford give feedback that children found viewpoint repetitive and cumbersome. They did not feel the need to complete a new questionnaire for each review. Carers and children have struggled to logon. Some of the games do not work.

The user group has also been made aware of some technical difficulties over the year. A number of people reported that they can login fine but once in, there is no start button to begin a questionnaire. All they see is a report button that shows them their answers to a previous questionnaire. A designated member in the user-group has to go in as the administrator and edit the questionnaire availability manually which resolves this issue. This has been raised as an issue and it is envisaged that this will be resolved by the end of the year.

There have also been problems linked to which Internet browser for people use when trying to use viewpoint. Viewpoint Organisation has since created a newer version of the Viewpoint website with a different URL (<https://vptweb.vptol.co.uk/Login>) and over time the older website will be phased out.

To support driving improvement in performance the following has been agreed -

- The need to identify champions from service areas as go to people for any technical problems and advice on viewpoint.
- Attendance from team managers and service managers after the restructure to refresh and drive Viewpoint.
- Further to the restructure, members of the user group to facilitate drop in sessions for social workers and managers to promote the functionality and better understanding of viewpoint.
- The new representative from Bradford's residential units to refresh and drive completion of more questionnaires for children living in residential settings.
- Viewpoint is now tablet and smart phone compatible. Bradford's children to be supported and encouraged to complete Viewpoint from their phone or tablet.

3. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

3.1 There are no other considerations.

4. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL

4.1 There is an annual licence fee for viewpoint.

5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES

5.1 N/A

6. LEGAL APPRAISAL

6.1 N/A

7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

7.1 EQUALITY & DIVERSITY

On speaking to the office of the chief executive there is nothing specific regarding children looked after and participation within Bradford's equality objectives.

7.2 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

N/A

7.3 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACTS

N/A

7.4 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

N/A

7.5 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

N/A

7.6 TRADE UNION

N/A

7.7 WARD IMPLICATIONS

N/A

**7.8 AREA COMMITTEE ACTION PLAN IMPLICATIONS
(for reports to Area Committees only)**

N/A.

7.9 IMPLICATIONS FOR CORPORATE PARENTING

Ensuring that children and young people have the opportunity to participate in their reviews to ensure that their wishes and experiences are heard and considered as part of the care planning process.

Challenging and strengthening services to improve outcomes for all children in Bradford.

7.10 ISSUES ARISING FROM PRIVACY IMPACT ASSESMENT

N/A

8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS

None.

9. OPTIONS

9.1 The viewpoint user group to continue to meet to improve performance, amending questionnaires, advising on any changes and dealing with all matters regarding viewpoint.

9.2 Review whether Viewpoint is the most effective way of capturing children's experiences

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 That the quartley reports available from Viewpoint are reviewed and discussed within the Viewpoint User group but are also shared with frontline service for discussion and review; this will help social workers to understand the experiences of children and young people.

10.2 Reports from Viewpoint are used to inform training.

10.3 As part of the improvement work, the following is considered -

- Completion and quality of lifestory work – how are children engaged in this work and the impact this has in terms of supporting children to understand their experiences.
- Indicators for what will make children feel settled and safe in placement – understanding the quality of placements through auditing and feedback from children through an adapted questionnaire.
- Improving communication within the placement and with the social worker – work with the fostering and residential services and the Children In care Teams (after restructure) to understand some of the challenges for children to develop positive relationships with carers and social workers and how to navigate some of the barriers to improve better and improved communications.
- Improved links between educations and Children’s Services to support an understanding of what education experiences are like for children as well as what support is available to help with homework.
- Ensure that carers and children are aware of the leisure offer from Bradford Council.

11. APPENDICES

11.1 N/A

12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

12.1 None