

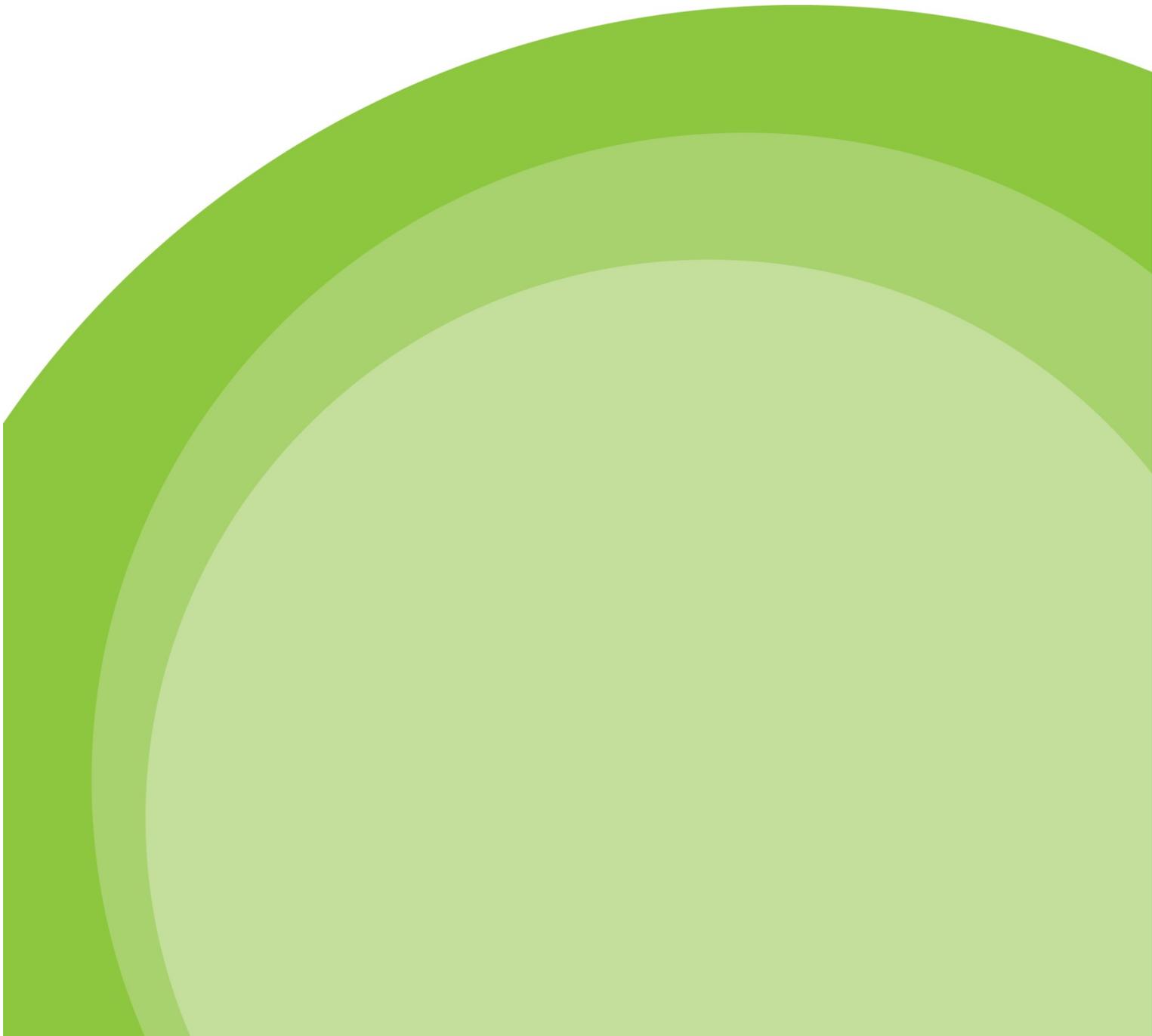
Appendix A

Central Bedfordshire Council
www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk



Children in Care Council and Participation 2015 - 2016

Annual Report



Aims and Objectives

The aim of the following report is to summarise and evaluate the work of the Children in Care Council (CiCC) and Participation Officer during 1st April 2015 – 31st March 2016.

Children in Care Council Achievements

Members of the CiCC were asked to list their achievements these included -

Meeting with the Children's Minister

Members of our CiCC attended a meeting with the Children's Minister Edward Timpson and the Children's Commissioner. Two young people attended the meeting and took part in discussions about people who have stuck with them and what it is like to be looked after in Central Bedfordshire Council. The young people received a letter from the minister thanking them for attending and sharing their personal experiences.

Corporate Parenting Taking it to the Next Level

Two members of the CiCC attended this event with Cllr Goodchild and it was a good opportunity for our CiCC to showcase our achievements. Young people spoke about how proud they were to represent Central Bedfordshire Council as it demonstrated that we are doing well as a CiCC. Other CiCC's commented and praised us on the relationship we have with the University of Bedfordshire and wanted more information to share with their local universities. 'We were able to listen to other children in care councils and it was interesting to hear some of the things that they do to support their young people but it was good to see that we do pretty much the same plus more which was something to be proud of. We also came away from the day ready to re design our pledge which was a huge positive as it's now underway.'

CiCC Member

'Taking it to the next level' corporate parent/CiCC Action plan

Name of Local Authority/council: central Bedfordshire

Today's Date: 21/11/15

Action	By whom	By when
1 making sure every young person gets the opportunity to complete life story work + future planning.	CiCC CPP	ASAP! for
2 Re-develop/launch the pledge with a focus on aspiration and education.	CiCC CPP	6 months.
3 Continue the work and further opportunities with the university and local colleges. (recreational activities)	CiCC CPP	continuous



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Meetings with the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel

One member of the Young Voices Group met with Councillor Hegley and shared her journey of care after she was awarded the Young Person of the Year award at the Annual Awards evening for looked after children and care leavers. The young person wrote an article for her school newsletter which she agreed to be shared with Councillors and senior managers.

Children's Commissioner Participation Group

Members of our CiCC have continued to support the participation group for the Children's Commissioner; the young people have shared their experiences. One young person attended the launch of the Children's Commissioner Report, presented information and took part in a live question panel with MPs, other care leavers and the Children's Minister. The young person was also invited to attend an event during Care Leavers Week to share her experiences.

The Frontline Programme

CiCC members were asked to attend the Frontline Training Programme which is a fast track social work qualification. The young people organised training for 128 social work students, they developed a workshop where participants create a 'social workers toolbox': 12 of our young people attended this. One young person was invited to attend the opening ceremony and read one of her poems to 220 guests; this was also mentioned by Edward Timpson in his opening speech to the participants. Four young people then returned to the training and supported the academic tutors in delivering another activity for direct work with young people.

'We are always grateful to have input on our training from young people and have been particularly humbled by those who choose to share personal experiences, such as one care leaver reading out a moving poem she had written. We are looking forward to this summer and further opportunities to deliver our programme in partnership with the CiCC. Thank you to all of those who contributed.'

Jo Williams, Senior Lecturer in Social Work, University of Bedfordshire

Training Days for Assisted and Supported Year of Employment (ASYE)

CiCC members have worked with the practise educator to develop a training programme for newly qualified social workers, this has been developed through personal experiences of our young people and looks at communication, games and activities to use with young people and the social workers tool box. Feedback from participants was very positive and social workers shared that the training made them think about their communication and using more creative ways to work with young people.

See Appendix 2 for detailed Training Programme.

Working with Children's Commissioning Service

CiCC members were invited to attend a consultation event on the Supervised Contact provider; Swanstaff. The young people gave their honest views on what is good about the service and what could be improved. Young people talked about having a fish tank in the centre, this feedback has been shared with Swanstaff and they are keen to implement this along with areas for improvement.

One member attended a Provider Forum Event which was arranged between Commissioning and the Voluntary Organisations for Children, Young People and

Families. 'It generated conversation amongst the groups around young people being involved in services and having their voice heard about the service. What was interesting is that a few of the providers did admit that although their organisations spoke about young peoples' involvement, the same organisations did feel that it was possibly only lip service. Emily being there really proved that a YPs voice is well worth listening to!' **Jill Clarke, Children's Services Commissioning Manager.**

Staff conference

The CiCC was invited to be part of the staff conferences which were organised for all workers within Children's Services.

'This was a really good event for members to be involved with. We had one member who designed all the posters and information to go on our board for the show and another member who stood at the board on each of the four days and answered any questions people had. One member was invited by Sue Harrison to make a speech about people that have made a difference in her life. This was a really good chance for our CiCC members to promote what we do to other workers across Childrens Services.' **CiCC Member.**

Meetings with Chief Executive, Director of Children's Services and the Assistant Director

CiCC members have attended meetings with Richard Carr and Sue Harrison and discussed the CiCC work plan and the Children's Survey. This was a good opportunity to feedback information on the services young people receive. The group then worked to develop the survey which is currently being distributed. The Young Voices group met with Richard Carr and Gerard Jones and played a game of Jenga. The game was created by one of the workers within the Corporate Parenting Service and a good example of the ways in which social workers need to be creative in the way they communicate with young people. This enabled the young people to find out about Richard and Gerard and for them to find out about the young people. The young voices group then gave feedback on what was good in Central Bedfordshire and what needed to be improved.

Corporate Parents as Mentors

Members of the CiCC have met with senior managers to get support for college work and a 'mentoring' relationship has started to develop. This is a good example of our young people being supported by their Corporate Parents and something the young people would like to further develop for Looked After Children.

The Awards

The Annual Awards evening took place on Friday 25th September 2015 in the Council Chamber at Priory House; there were over 100 young people who attended the event to receive their award which was presented by Councillor Hegley, Executive Member for Social Care & Housing.

'The Awards was a real success, many new and old faces attending and receiving awards for brilliant successes they have had over the year. Lots of fun activities for the guests to take part in such as RC car racing, photo booth, face painting and tattooing and we had two beautiful steam engines for people to see by the entrance.'

CiCC Member.

The University of Bedfordshire

The University of Bedfordshire has continued to support our Looked After Children and Care Leavers through their Access Partnership Team. The team organised two days where the young people were able to engage in fun activities whilst thinking about their future aspirations, the young people recorded a radio show and took part in a graduation ceremony. Workers from the Virtual School attended the days and supported the young people which also meant the information could be shared during the Personal Education Plan meeting.

The Children in Care Council

The membership of both the Children in Care Council and the Young Voices Group is continuously changing; this could depend on a number of factors, for example some young people may choose to not be involved due to their personal situations. Where possible we try to continue the engagement of young people using different forms of engagement. This could be 1:1 work or specific pieces of consultation work where appropriate.

There are currently 14 young people who are participating in CiCC work, these young people have taken part in informal consultation. Discussions have taken place with regards to the meeting arrangements which, due to their personal commitments, hasn't allowed the young people to meet in a formal meeting. The young people have met as a group during events for example at the Frontline training where they have discussed their priorities.

	Number	Looked After	Leaving Care
Female	8	1	7
Male	6	1	5

The Young Voices Group for looked after children between the ages of 8 – 15 years, continues to develop with around 33 young people attending the most recent event.

	8 -12 year olds	12 – 16 year olds
Female	9	10
Male	8	6

The feedback from the event was very positive, with young people stating that it was good to see their workers during a fun activity and that they would like to have more of these events with their workers. A number of CiCC representatives also attended to support the younger looked after children during the event and we also completed some of the Children's Survey as a pilot.

'I know the kids really enjoyed it! I loved it also and it was really good to be able to spend time with the children like that, rather than sitting with them in a living room!!!'

Emma Cox, Social Worker.

Newsletters from members of the CiCC along with Sue Harrison's blog continues to be sent out to all of our looked after children, these are also uploaded onto the website for Looked After Children and Care Leavers.

Members of the CiCC continue to attend all Corporate Parenting Panel meetings and contribute to discussions, sharing experiences and attend the panel to present information on their work plan three times per year.

A report has been written and presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel with information on how the CiCC is going to be developed. The Young Voices Group will become the CiCC and the current CiCC members will become Ambassadors. Leaving care young people could then establish their own group to focus on leaving care services.

The CiCC members continue to support the Participation Officer on how the budget is spent and give good ideas on how best to use the money available.

Consultation Events

The Young Voices along with members of the CiCC attended a consultation event with Independent Review Officers and worked together on 'what makes a good Looked After Children's Review'. Feedback from the event from both workers and young people has been very positive, one young person stating 'it was good to meet our IRO outside of the meetings we have and to go and do a fun activity with them.'
Young Voices member.

Another young person said following the event 'my review was the best one I have ever had as I felt I now had a relationship with my Independent Review Officer and it wasn't just another professional at my review.'

Whilst taking part in the activity programme informal consultations took place on the Comments, Complaints and Compliments procedure and if young people knew how to make a complaint. This information was shared with the Customer Relations manager which will be used to develop the service.

Young people have been involved in the design of the CiCC website, www.cbccicc.org.uk they have given feedback on the website and the information included.

Young people were also consulted on the awards evening, the summer activities programme and the Leaving Care Christmas Party.

Meetings with Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking children take place every 6 weeks with Leaving Care Team Manager and social workers. The purpose of the meetings is to raise awareness of entitlements, under the Leaving Care Act and moving into independent living, UK Laws, Culture, share information and discuss topics on what the young people like and don't like. Information is shared with the young people from the participation officer and any feedback shared with the service.

CiCC Involvement

Members of the CiCC continue to be part of the information evenings and training for foster carers, where they create a house to represent what makes a good foster carer.

'I really enjoy doing the info evening for the fostering team, they always make me feel valued and I think it's nice for potential foster carers to hear a current foster carer's story and also a child that's been in the system.' **CiCC Member.**

One member of our CiCC has attended the Looked After Children's Health Improvement Meeting and shared her experiences. One of the main issues this young person wanted to raise was around the emotional and mental health support for children and young people and the transfer to adult mental health services. This young person also attended a meeting with the new service provider for the Child and Adolescent Mental Health service and was invited to sit on an interview panel for positions within this service.

The CiCC members have also worked with our Leisure Services and attended meetings to promote leisure for our looked after children, 3 activity days were arranged as part of the activity based participation during the school holidays where young people took part in fun activities at our leisure centres; this promoted the centers to our young people. The leisure services also arranged for our young people and their foster families free swimming passes during the school holidays.

Young people have been involved in the recruitment to a number of positions for Central Bedfordshire Council, including Independent Review Officers, the manager of the Conference and Review Service, Personal Advisers working with the Virtual School and the Youth Support Team and a LAC Support Officer for the Virtual School.

Activity Based Participation

There have been a number of activity days during the year for looked after children. We have had 52 young people between the ages of 5 and 15 attend at least one of the activity days.

The activity days have also been well attended by social workers from the Corporate Parenting Team, which has been very positive for both young people and workers in developing relationships. We have also had some of the Independent Review Officers attending the activities and again this has supported the development of positive working relationships.

Feedback from young people has been positive and there has been a request for more of these days to be organised throughout the summer holidays. One foster carer stated 'It has really helped the placement as we were struggling with the 3 siblings during the holidays.'

Future Priorities

The CiCC have discussed the need to change and develop. A plan was put together to make the Young Voices Group the new CiCC, the current members of the CiCC will then become ambassadors and support the younger members. A new group for the leaving care young people could then be established to focus on leaving care.

From the consultation events and attending the Corporate Parenting Event the future priorities for members of the CiCC are –

- Life Story work for all and to have a focus on future planning
- The Pledge and Monitoring the Pledge.
- Continuing the work with the University of Bedfordshire to offer opportunities to raise aspirations and explore options.
- The Children's Survey and the results from this.
- Corporate Parents as Mentors for Looked After Children.

The activity programme needs to be developed with input from the CiCC and Young Voices. More activities need to be arranged for the older young people and funding options are being explored.

The Awards evening has been provisionally booked for Friday 21st October 2016 in the Council Chamber; discussions need to take place with facilities to ensure the event can take place in the Chamber. Representatives from the CiCC along with Ambassadors will organise the event.

Challenges

There have been a small number of new young people wanting to join the CiCC this could be due to personal situations, however there have not been any activity days for the over 16 young people which are a good way to engage with this age group. Young people have reported that taking part in an activity day allows them to meet other young people and the participation officer, which then helps young people with their confidence to attend a meeting.

Support for the activities and meetings can often be a challenge due to social workers not always having the time to support the activities.

Some of the needs of the young people have been a challenge and the high level of support some of the young people need to be able to participate in activities and meetings.

The leisure service have previously supported the activities for our young people and funded swimming passes for the summer holidays. Due to funding this may not be available this year and so could reduce the number of activity days available.

Children's participation work is prioritised by the department but financial pressures on Children's Services have lead to challenges. For example some young people need transport to attend events and in previous years flexibility with budgets has meant additional funding has been available. This will continue to be a challenge but the Director and Assistant Director are keen to ensure this work continues.

Conclusion

Current Members of the CiCC continue to have strong links with the Corporate Parenting Panel and Senior Officers including the Chief Executive, the Director of Children's Services and the Assistant Director and have developed new relationships

with officers from health, education, learning and development and the commissioning service. This has helped with the promotion of the CiCC.

The CiCC continue to be involved in areas of work for Central Bedfordshire Council and gain valuable experience and skills in being part of this which has enabled young people to use the experience when applying for jobs or training. A work placement has been supported which both the local authority and the young person have benefited from.

The CiCC continues to develop and change and going forward the new CiCC made up of the young people aged 8 – 16 will be supported by the CiCC Ambassadors. This will ensure that the voice of both looked after children and care leavers are represented. There will be a plan to further develop the relationship between the CiCC members and the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Young people involved in the work of the CiCC enjoy the activities and the opportunities it has provided; some of the younger members have attended meetings with the Children's Minister and the Children's Commissioner. Young people have been able to develop their own skills during the work with the CiCC and have used these experiences in looking for education, training or employment.

Young people who are part of the CiCC are valued members and are given positive feedback. The young people themselves report that they feel valued and enjoy being part of the CiCC using their own experiences to improve the services for other children and young people who are looked after by Central Bedfordshire Council.

One young person stated that 'The CiCC is important to me because it gives me so many opportunities to make a difference in young people's lives within the system. I also get to meet with other care experienced young people and we support each other. I get the opportunity to take part in fun activities being a peer mentor to the young children, which is something that I love doing! Having the choice to attend significant meetings and groups and be the voice.

I never imagined all the important people I would meet! I feel proud to be part of the CiCC, it has helped me boost my confidence, learn to adapt in different situations, learn how to be professional and I've been lucky to take part in activities where we get results out of it. There's so many amazing experiences I can put on my CV and I use what I learn in the CiCC in my day to day life and also at college. It's changed me as a person; I have become more independent and have more self esteem. It's important for me to be part of the CiCC as it gives me something to look forward to that I'm passionate about'.