

**Children in Care
Council and
Participation
2017 - 2018
Annual Report**

A great place to live and work.

Aims and Objectives

The aim of this report is to summarise and evaluate the work of the Children in Care Council (CiCC) and Participation Officer for the period of 1st April 2017 to 31st March 2018. A special thanks to the CiCC who assisted with writing this report.

The CiCC continue to be involved in addressing policy decisions, contribute to consultations, support with recruitment and training and undertake presentations at various forums to improve the lives of children and young people in care.

CiCC Membership and Recruitment

As of 1st April 2018, there were 317 Looked After Children (LAC) in Central Beds Council (CBC). Many looked after children access the fun activities provided during the school holidays despite not being a CiCC member. The CiCC is a diverse group of 20 core group members and their ages range from 11 to 25. The profile of the current CiCC membership is as follows:

- 12 members are school aged children including 2 who are part of the Gifted and Talented Scheme, and 1 is an Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking child (UASC).
- 2 Ambassadors are studying university degrees (a CiCC Ambassador is a Care Leaver over the age of 16).
- 4 Ambassadors are attending local colleges studying ESOL, BTEC's and A Level courses. (2 are UASC's). One of the them hopes to go to East Anglia University in Sept 2018.
- 1 Ambassador is in her final year at 6th form and hopes to go to Brighton University in Sept 2018.
- 1 Ambassador works for a Gardening Landscape company.

One thing they have in common, is their experiences of being in care in CBC and their determination and commitment to make improvements. They really enjoy being part of the CiCC, as it gives them a voice, the opportunity to have fun and be listened to by elected members and the Children Services senior management team. They also know their work makes a real difference.

The recruitment of CiCC members comes from Social Workers, Personal Advisors, Foster Carers, through newsletters and through word of mouth.

CiCC Achievements in Influencing Change

CiCC Pledge

The Pledge is a set of promises that Central Beds Council makes to all looked after children and care leavers. The promises are based on what children and young people in care said was important to them. The Pledge was written by the CiCC and agreed by the Corporate Parenting Panel.

The new Pledge will be re-launched at the Children in Care Summer Ball and Awards Night on 20th July 2018. Leaflets will be designed for all staff to sign up and fully support the pledge.

Corporate Parenting Panel

The CiCC work closely with the Corporate Parenting Panel, where ambassadors champion the voice of children in care and care leavers. Whilst presenting the Pledge, the CiCC said they wanted better support in exploring careers and hobbies. In response, the Councillors created the 'Aspirations Wish List' by using their links within the community to offer taster or work experience opportunities. The Councillors provided the following opportunities to young people:

- 2 Ambassadors showcased their talent at the Cheering Volunteering Awards at the Grove Theatre, Dunstable.
- 5 CiCC representatives visited Luton Football Club. One CiCC representative said, *'The Luton town mascot experience was brilliant, and it was a great day out, I really enjoyed meeting the players and staff, they made me feel very welcome. And if I could, I would do it again and again'*.
- 16 children and young people visited Beds & Luton Fire & Rescue Station and thoroughly enjoyed the experience. One of the young people then applied to become a Fire Cadet after the visit.
- The senior management team also arranged for 2 Ambassadors to shadow social workers in the Family Support team.

Leaving Care Peer Report

This review was carried out by a Service Director from Suffolk and two Heads of Service from neighbouring local authorities. Discussions took place with the CiCC on their views about the support they receive. The CiCC also provided examples of what was good in CBC. They said; *'Having positive relationships with Sue Harrison (DCS) and Gerard Jones (AD), feeling that their voices are heard, and knowing that the CiCC makes a difference to children in care.*

The CiCC also felt improvements needed to be made on the following:

The Complaints Process

We have been working with the Customer Service team to simplify the current process and to make it more accessible. The young person has the option to be fully supported by our Advocacy service, which is a service offered to all children and young people in care. We will also be asking the CiCC to train managers in responding to young people. In addition, the Mind Of My Own App (MOMO) allows young people to send a message to the Customer Service team, should they wish to make a complaint.

Written leaving care entitlement needs to be clear and accessible.

The CiCC felt an App that has up to date information about their rights and entitlements would help to address this. The Care Leaver App has been purchased and will provide help and support for young people as they leave care. The App will also help to meet new duties from the local offer for care leavers.

To develop Life Story Work.

We will continue to build on this and ensure great life story books are created with young people and their carers, alongside sensitive and clear later-life letters to provide our children with a secure base to explore their past, present and future.

CiCC meetings with Head of Service for Corporate Parenting and Participation Officer

The CiCC meet regularly to present issues they feel strongly about in an interactive way and influence change. They discuss; what's working well, what is not so good and what needs to change in CBC. There's been 3 meetings so far, with an average of 8 representatives attending every month.

The CiCC said '*The CiCC meetings provide a sense of belonging. And help us to know about our rights and entitlements*'.

The meetings also provide opportunities for colleagues to promote the services provided to looked after children. Colleagues from the Advocacy Service, Children's Commissioning, Virtual Schools and Fostering team have attended so far and have all said the meetings are '*valuable*'. Some colleagues have made changes to every day practice as a result of the meeting. Future meetings will have professionals from CAMHS, Alan Caton the LSCB Chair and Bedford Borough to plan joined up CiCC events.

CiCC representatives are beginning to challenge and hold services to account in areas that are not working so well, for example they said:

- *The CiCC didn't understand what the Advocacy Service do or provide.* In response, the manager from the Advocacy service attended March's meeting and is attending future meetings as well.
- *The Participation Officer needs to hold more CiCC activities in the South.* In response, the Participation Officer arranged two activities in the South in February 2018 and further activities will be planned in the summer.
- *More activities need to be arranged for older children.* Activities such as a 5 a side football tournament and BBQ have now been arranged for the summer.

Some of the CiCC representatives also spoke highly about the support they receive from their social workers. They said:

- *Our world is full of known heroes, Batman, Iron Man, The Doctor... but our world also has unrecognized heroes including my excellent social worker. She is funny, kind, calm, and humble!*
- *My social workers and personal advisor play a big role to change my life and education. I don't have enough words to explain all what they have done for me.*
- *Since I moved from my last Foster Carer, my social worker has always been there for me – making sure I was happy and safe. She cares about me and helps me to get things done for me.*

Children & Young People's Board (CYP) and Youth Parliament – Part of the Active Participation Strategy

A new (CYP) Board was recently set up as a sub group of the Children's Leadership Board which CiCC representatives now attend. The board meets regularly with representatives from existing CYP bodies to ensure young people have a voice on; what is going well and what they would like to change to make their life better. The CiCC representatives also gain accreditation and qualifications.

The focus of work is developing a tool kit for schools around mental health. The group also raised concerns about the extensive waiting times to see professionals for Mental Health support.

From attending these meetings, 3 CiCC representatives signed up and actively involved in CBC's Youth Parliament. Angela Perry Youth Support manager said, *'the offer to include young people in care in Youth Parliament has been taken up and we now have 3 looked after children who are part of this. This is exciting because the Youth Parliament members work on national issues for young people as well as local ones. It is a great experience for the young people involved and good to know their voice is included in this forum'*. One of the CiCC Ambassador's said *'I went on the residential and learnt more about the Youth Parliament and met existing members. We had lots and fun and exchanged loads of ideas'*.

CICC working with Children's Commissioning

Last spring, the CICC helped to develop a Young Peoples Quality Assurance role with Sharon Deacon, Quality Assurance Manager. This role was developed with Ambassadors who have experience of living in 16 plus accommodation. They completed the LSCB Safeguarding training and completed two visits (to test the inspection framework) with the QA Manager. The ambassadors were also invited to a national Children's Commissioning Conference in July to facilitate a workshop and share their good practice. Sharon said *'Gaining a young person's perspective was very helpful. I was*

delighted by the interest and attendance at our workshop. The ambassadors were the stars of the show, as they participated with the audience and answered the many interested questions that were asked with total confidence’.

Since February 2018, the CiCC have been involved to see how we can provide better, more integrated, locality-based support to children and families. Toni Badnall (Commissioning Officer) wrote, *‘Please thank the CiCC as it really means a lot to us to involve the CiCC, as their experiences can help shape the services we commission in the future and make sure that what we provide is the right thing for children and young people’.*

CiCC Representing Virtual Schools Governing Body

The CiCC attended the Virtual Schools meeting to champion the educational needs of CBC Looked After Children. During the meeting, the CiCC representative asked, *‘if all schools could provide incentives for improving attendance (for LAC) in schools’*, as her school (Harlington Upper School) were operating successfully by using this approach’. This is currently being explored.

Meetings with the OFSTED, Senior Management team, Regional Meetings, Conferences and Award Ceremony

OFSTED’s Single inspection of CBC

The CiCC met with the inspection team and were asked questions about their work and the support they are offered. The group worked together to give a real insight into the CiCC work and what they are most proud of. They talked about the Pledge, their work with Frontline, how they were involved to trial the MOMO App, ASYE Recruitment and Training, Children’s Commissioning and Life Story work. The Inspectors were so impressed with their responses they were described as *‘Awesome Children in Care Council’*. The inspection report also quoted *‘The impressive and influential Children in Care Council (CiCC) meaningfully participates in service developments and actively supports the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel’.*

Meetings with Chief Executive, Councillor and Senior Management team

The CiCC had the chance to talk openly about their experiences of being in care and the Pledge at a lunch planned in February half term. What was clear from the CiCC was how much they value their social workers and feel that their opinions are valued. *“One of the CiCC representatives said, “It was great fun and it was nice to have important people who listened to me.”*

Eastern Regional Region CiCC Get together meetings

CiCCs’ from the Eastern Region got together to discuss some minimum standards to bring positive change. These meetings also provided the opportunity to share examples of good practice and to raise any issues.

One of the CiCC representatives said *'I really enjoyed meeting other CiCC representatives and working with them on producing the 'Top Ten Tips for Social Workers. As a small group, we came up with the following Top Ten Social Worker tips:*

- Smile and be friendly.
- Tell us if you can't make appointments: be organised and be on time.
- Life story work is great – revisit it often.
- Be truthful even if it's bad news.
- Listen to the carer's views
- Talk in comfortable areas: children love doing activities.
- Get to know me: don't force me to talk if you don't want to.
- Show that you care and be respectful.
- See us more regularly.
- I'd like to keep the same social worker for as long as possible.
- Make sure they say goodbye if you have to leave.

CiCC Ambassador presented at the National Children and Adult Services Conference

A CiCC Ambassador presented to a large audience of people in leadership roles with the senior management team last October. The CiCC Ambassador said *'The day was really good, and the audience were welcoming and gave their full attention in listening to the work of CiCC. I really enjoyed being part of this experience and would love the opportunity to do this again'*.

Celebrating the Achievements for Children in Care

The Children in Care Achievements Awards took place on 1st December 2017, with nearly 250 people in attendance. Once again, CBC colleagues were encouraged to nominate young people for any achievement during the last year. We received over 220 nominations for reasons which included educational achievements and developing independence skills.

The event's theme was the Wild West which was chosen by the CiCC. There was a wide range of entertainment provided, such as; the Rodeo Bull, John Wayne Horse Shoe Challenge, an outstanding singing performance by a CiCC Ambassador. All the children and care leavers that attended were delighted to receive an award for their achievement.

This email was received by a colleague from CBC's Young Person Support team. *'Please let me take this opportunity to share my thanks and gratitude for being part of the LAC Awards. Equally I would like my gratitude to be shared with all the people who worked so hard to make this evening so special. For me it was a very humbling experience and proved that good things are being achieved by the various professionals across children's services and that young people's lives are being changed for the better.*

Virtual Apps to Increase Participation and Engagement



The Mind OF My Own App (MOMO) gives children and young people an instant way to express their views, wishes and feelings – anytime and anywhere using a phone, tablet or computer.

The responsibility for overseeing MOMO and increasing its uptake is owned by the Participation Officer. Since going live (September 2017), there has been:

- 66 children and young people using the app.
- 87 children services colleagues using the app, whilst visiting the young person.
- 200 MOMO statements received sharing feedback, good stories, and asking for help to solve problems to move forward.

The evidence 'so far' indicates that we are responding positively to the voice of the child. The next steps are to:

- Attend team meetings to emphasise the benefits of MOMO for children and young people.
- Introduce the MOMO app at Children Services inductions.
- Promote MOMO at the Children in Care Summer Ball and Awards Night on 20th July 2018.
- Ask IT to connect MOMO to every Laptop, iPad and iPhone to ensure every children services front line colleague has access and is using the App.

CiCC Virtual WhatsApp group

This method of communication is another platform for the CiCC to voice their opinions and to be listened to. The WhatsApp group also reaches those who just want to dip in and out to find out what's going on and reaches to those who are placed outside CBC. The group consists of 25 participants, including the Senior Management Team. The group was created in January 2018 and nearly 350 conversations have taken place so far. There have been discussions around:

- Debate around the possible exemption of council tax for care leavers
- Requests for support with college and university assignments
- Help with childcare.
- Sharing videos to build confidence and self-esteem.

The CiCC said one of the reasons for its success is having senior leadership excited about being involved.

CiCC supporting with Recruitment and Training

ASYE Recruitment and Training

The CiCC were involved in the ASYE training and recruitment. They used their own experiences to develop the training to ensure that workers have skills and tools to work with our young people. Participants said the games and their advice was helpful in building meaningful relationships with young people.

The CiCC also sat on three interview panels for roles in Children's Social Care, including senior management posts.

Frontline Programme

Last summer, the CiCC were approached for the fourth year running to deliver training to university social work students at Warwick University. The CiCC ambassadors designed the program which included ice breakers and games to introduce better direct work with children and young people.

They started by providing a presentation to 300 participants about their work. There were many questions from the students about being looked after in CBC. The CiCC spoke highly of the support they receive from CBC and gave the students some good tips on how to be a good social worker. Jo Williams (Practice Tutor, Frontline) said she was very impressed with CBC's CiCC and how the members spoke with honesty and enthusiasm when delivering the training.

Another opportunity arose in March 2018 when a group of 7 CiCC representatives were invited to speak at a conference in Hertfordshire. The youngest representative was 11 years old. Once again, they led exercises to 120 students to encourage and support them to think more about the needs and wishes of looked after children. This exercise also helped the student social workers to think beyond the theory and imagine how they would help children and young people in real life. Jo from Frontline said, *'The CBC CiCC have been supporting our teaching for the past 4 years and are always one of the highlights of the programme. This year, we invited them to come along and talk to students at the very start of their journey, as part of their induction. As ever, they were an inspiration and captivated the audience with their presentation and workshop'*.

Activities provided during school holidays

144 Looked after children and care leavers accessed activities between April 2017 to March 2018. The list of activities and the number of children and young people are included in **Appendix One**.

The activities have been supported by members of the Corporate Parenting Panel, Independent Reviewing and Virtual Schools team. Through observation, the children and young people really valued the opportunity to interact and build meaningful relationships with their social workers. They feel that their social workers have invested in them by spending this time outside of their statutory duties.

Challenges

The challenge remains in reaching out to children and young people whose voices are less easily heard, such as those placed out of county, those placed in children’s homes and residential units for disabled children and young people.

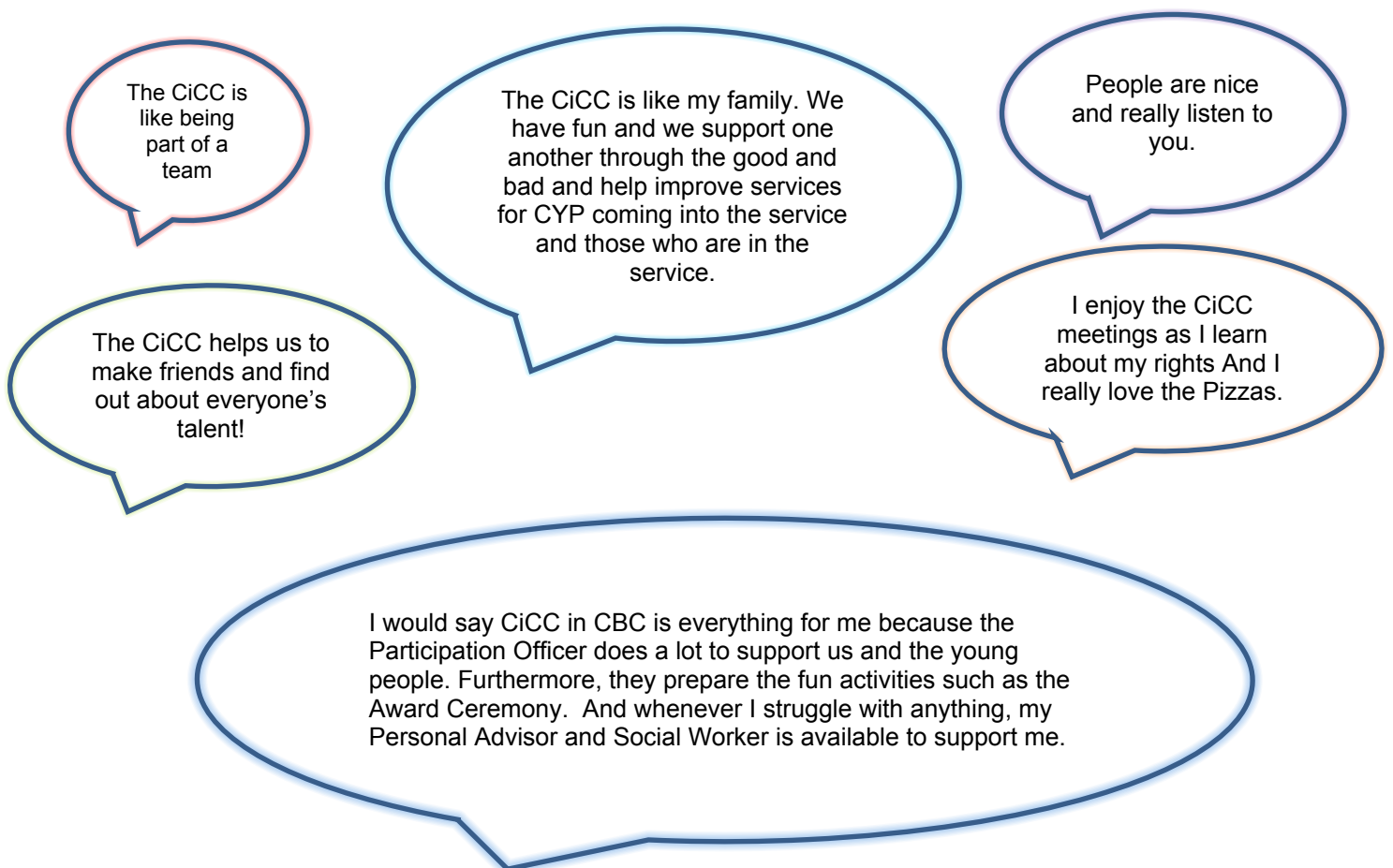
Future Priorities

Projects	Timescales	Who is involved	Outcomes
To update the CiCC Website	July 2018	CiCC, Participation Officer and Communication Team	<p>To find up to date information about being a looked after Child or a Care Leaver in Central Beds Council.</p> <p>To ensure that children and young people are aware of their entitlements during their time in care and when leaving care.</p> <p>To advertise future meetings and to have minutes of previous meetings.</p> <p>Have useful documents and links to other websites which can help children in care and care leavers.</p> <p>To ensure engagement with the CiCC with all looked after children.</p>
Organise a new Care Leavers Group	June 2018	CiCC and Head of Service for Corporate Parenting	<p>To discuss the;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care Leaver Offer - what it means to them. To find out about their rights and entitlements. • Introduce the new Care Leavers App • To ensure that young people are supported through transition to adulthood.

Life Story Work For All	October 2018	CiCC Ambassador with support from identified social workers.	To develop Life Story Work to establish what is offered to young people and what could be improved.
Complete a video as a 'Guide to the CiCC' to recruit new members	November 2018	CiCC, Participation Officer and Communication team	To help new children and young people going into care. Help with training for new colleagues and Foster Carers'.

Conclusion

The CiCC have achieved a great deal over the past twelve months through continuous work dedicated to improving services for children and young people in care in CBC. The report illustrates the growth and value of the CiCC, both at a local and national level. And finally, to finish on 'what the CiCC means to the them.



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