

9 March 2017		ITEM: 8
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Children in Care Council and Voice of the child		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-Key	
Report of: Natalie Carter, Open Door		
Accountable Head of Service: Andrew Carter, Children's Social Care (CATO)		
Accountable Director: Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children's Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report updates members of the Committee in respect to the functioning of the Children in Care Council (CICC) and its actions in representing the voice of the child for looked after children and care leavers.

- 1. Recommendation(s)**
 - 1.1 Corporate Parenting Committee support the role of the CICC**
 - 1.2 Councillors and senior officers attend the CICC meetings when invited**
 - 1.3 Corporate Parenting support and endorse the role of the Young People's Project**

2. Introduction and Background

Children in Care Council

- 2.1 The Children in Care Council is part of the Government's drive to ensure the voice of the child is an integral part of all the work undertaken within Children's Services.
- 2.2 The Government White Paper, Care Matters, Time for Change in 2007, made it a statutory duty for all local authorities to have a Children in Care Council
- 2.3 The document stated: *'It is important that children have a chance to shape and influence the parenting that they receive at every level – from expressing their wishes and feelings about the individual care they receive in their*

placements, through to helping shape the overall strategy for children in their area through a Children in Care Council'

- 2.4 The Children in Care Council was transferred to Open Door in February 2012, following a review undertaken by former care experienced young people (LILAC) in February 2011
- 2.5 The review stated: *"LILAC Assessors felt that potentially an independent body should take more of a hand in running the CICC so that issues can be explored fully, as currently members of the CICC feel they stop at a certain level of management and it may be possible for more to be achieved without any risk of a conflict of interest."*
- 2.6 The Children in Care Council currently have 15 active members who attend the monthly meetings, training and planning days and promotional events. Since the transfer there have been 26 young people who have joined the Children in Care Council.
- 2.7 The Children in Care Council have a Chair and Vice Chair nominated by the children and young people.
- 2.8 There is an agenda drawn up for each meeting and in the past 2 years they have devised a yearly work plan, which does change throughout the year depending on the current issues and the membership.
- 2.9 The Department provides Open Door with £8,000.00 per annum to assist with the costs of running the Children in Care Council

Voice of the child

- 2.9 As mentioned, the voice of the child is an integral part of the work Children's Services undertakes regardless of what the issues are.
- 2.10 The Children Act 1989, section 1 (3a) states that *'when determining any question with respect to the upbringing of a child, the court shall have regard in particular to the ascertainable wishes and feelings of the child concerned (considered in the light of his age and understanding)*
- 2.11 A further piece of guidance that is very important to note is that of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 12 states the following:
 1. *Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views, the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.*
 2. *For this purpose the child shall in particular, be provided the opportunity to be heard in a judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative, or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.*

- 2.12 Open Door work within the National Advocacy Standards (Department of Health, 2002), and as such is led by the young people.
- 2.13 The voice of the child is sought via many avenues within the processes undertaken within the Department and in practice. Examples of this are as follows:
- Within public court proceedings the child is represented by a Children's Guardian appointed by the courts
 - In Looked After Children's Reviews the IRO will speak to the child/young person on their own to seek their views
 - It is expected when Social Workers visit the children/young people they are seen alone in order to obtain their views
 - Within **all** reports (ie assessments, care plans, pathway plans, court reports) it is expected that the views/wishes and feelings of the child/young person is recorded
 - We have the services of Open Door and the Advocacy Service, along with the Independent Visitors who will also represent the views of the children/young people.
- 2.14 The advocacy service is known as the Young People Looked After Project (YPLA), and is an independent project facilitated by Open Door. The project works with young people aged between 8 – 25 who are looked after or have been looked after and are entitled to an after care service.
- 2.15 The aim of the project is to give young people a voice in matters that affect their lives, particularly regarding issues that come about through being looked after or leaving care.
- 2.16 The project in the main works with individuals, but can provide a service for groups of looked after children/young people with identified common issues. It aims to nurture a trusting and honest relationship with the young people, but also with professionals.
- 2.17 The Advocacy Service is a confidential service but works within the statutory guidance for child protection.
- 2.18 The Project wherever possible aims to help resolve issues at the earliest opportunity to cause the minimum amount of distress and to prevent escalation to a formal complaint stage.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 Issues

3.1.1 Children in Care Council Activity

The CICC supported the Looked After Children celebration event held in February 2016, allowing young people to celebrate their achievements for 2015. Young people with their foster families had an evening of roller skating, attended also by staff, Councillors and senior officers. The event was very well attended.

3.1.2 The next celebration event will be on 31st March 2017 for achievements in 2016. Certificates of achievement will be presented to all young people including those who do not attend. Their certificates will be posted to them.

3.1.3 Nominations are made prior to the event by professionals, these are reviewed by a panel of people from social care and members of the CICC. Two awards are given to four age groups, 11 and under, 12-16, 16-18, 18 +. The CICC have requested an additional award category of 18 +. The CICC were of the opinion that many young people make life changing achievements within this age group. The previous achievement category awarded those 16 and above.

3.1.4 In July and September 2016 the CICC facilitated a workshop for the social work recruitment day. This gave members the opportunity to be part of the recruitment process for new social workers who had applied to join Thurrock's social work teams. The aim of the workshop is to assess the candidates to see how well they can work as part of a team and demonstrate good organisation skills using the resources available.

3.1.5 The CICC have met with Health, Education, Team Managers and the Commissioning Team to consult on issues that particularly affect children and young people in care.

3.1.6 The CICC have been involved in the commissioning process in relation to foster care agency recruitment since 2012. They have contributed to the tendering process by devising two questions for prospective agencies. They were given the opportunity to mark the answers received as part of the tendering process organised by the Eastern Region Foster Care Select List, and give their feedback.

3.1.7 In September 2016 Joseph Kaley was supported by Natalie Carter to apply for the SIAG position. This is for a young person to become a member and attend the Strategic Independent Advisory Group. Joseph was successful and appointed for this position and now attends regular meetings representing young people in care.

3.1.8 The CICC facilitated the out of borough survey report presented to the corporate parent committee in October 2016. The Young people would like this to continue annually and to include a survey to all looked after young people about their views on the pledge.

- 3.1.9 The CICC held a meet and greet event in November 2016. All councillors, managers and staff were invited to this event. This was a good opportunity for the CICC to showcase some of the work they have done, how they feel about being part of the CICC and to discuss future work the CICC plan.
- 3.1.10 The CICC has been focussing on ways to promote the pledge. Members of the CICC directed a short video clip on the importance of the pledge. The video clip demonstrates the need for professionals to take the promises within the pledge into consideration during their everyday practice.
- 3.1.11 In November 2016 a few CICC members went along to a regional event held at the University of Cambridge. This gave the CICC an opportunity to interact with other CICC's. Members participated in workshops to voice their opinions and experiences in care. The event was attended by Anne Longfield, Children's Commissioner for England and her team. The young people felt listened to and they shared ideas with other CICC's.
- 3.1.12 The CICC are supporting the Trailblazer Project to encourage young people and their carers to access the ongoing opportunities the Royal Opera House offer. This has given young people and carers the opportunity to experience a welcome performance of the opera 'La Traviata'.

3.2. Pledge

- 3.2.1 All looked after young people have been provided with a copy of the pledge / advocacy leaflet and 'who cares magazine'. The promotion of the pledge will continue to those in care and those entering the care system. CICC members would like to have a role in the foster care and social work training for Thurrock.
- 3.2.2 The amendments made to the pledge in 2015 regarding passports and bank accounts are now included in the work programme of the corporate parent committee, the young people are now satisfied this is being monitored and statistics will continue to increase, leading to all young people having identification and a bank account when they leave care.
- 3.2.3 The Pledge is due to be reviewed and amendments identified in 2018, the CICC will consult with young people in care about the pledge during 2017 and identify any amendments to be made during this period, an update and any amendments can be submitted to the corporate parent committee in March 2018.
- 3.2.4 The CICC on behalf of all looked after young people will focus on promoting the pledge to social care / foster carers and will continue to consult with young people about the promises made in the pledge.

3.3 Voice of the child activity

3.3.1 In 2015-16 our advocates addressed and raised 106 issues on behalf of Thurrock Looked after Children. The majority of issues raised were dealt with at an informal stage. Only three issues were raised through Thurrock's complaints procedure.

3.3.2 The Young people looked after project is client led and `issue led` the young people are supported until the matter is resolved to everyone`s satisfaction.

3.3.3 The issues raised on behalf of the young people in 2015-16 included the following:

- Sibling contact
- Contact with birth parents
- Change of placement
- Assessing education (ESOL)
- Travel costs
- Change of social worker
- Support at formal meetings such as LAC reviews & CP meeting (for care leaver parents)
- DWP & Home Office issues
- Introducing young people to legal professionals

4. **Reasons for Recommendation**

4.1 It is important that we have mechanisms to elicit the voice of children and young people.

4.2 The CICC is statutory, but we need to continue to increase the numbers of those engaging and create other means for communicating the work of this group, such as a web page within the Looked After Children web site.

5. **Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

N/A

6. **Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact**

N/A

7. **Implications**

7.1 **Financial**

Implications verified by: **Jo Freeman**
Management Accountant

The numbers of looked after children have increased. This will have an impact on the work undertaken by Open Door and its capacity in term of staffing

Finance for the functioning of the CICC needs to be assured as it is a statutory duty

The use and the role of the Young People's Looked After Project will need to be financed and supported as it is also an integral part of the work undertaken on behalf of Children's Social Care

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**
Principal Solicitor Children's Safeguarding

The Local Authority has a duty to provide all the services mentioned in this report and will need to continue to provide these services in the future.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Becky Price**
Community Development Officer

The Children in Care Council provides a voice for looked after children, or those leaving care, and is an integral part of the work of Children's Services. The CICC helps to ensure that young people can influence matters that affect their lives the. The report refers to future efforts to increase the numbers of young people engaging and therefore represented by this service.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

N/A

8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

9. Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1 - Children in Care Council terms of reference (1)
- Appendix 2 - The National Standards for the Provision of Children's Advocacy Services 2002

Report Author:

Natalie Carter
Open Door Services