

4 January 2023		ITEM: 6
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Children In Care Council Update		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non Key	
Report of: Laura Hall, CICC Project Worker, Kim Synclair Operations Director and Charlotte Hearn Co-ordinator Chair Person: Christopher Bennett		
Accountable Assistant Director: Janet Simon, Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Early Help		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director Children's Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

The Children in Care Council is facilitated and run by Open Door, who are commissioned by Thurrock Council. This update report is to update the Committee on the work done and their engagement with the Service.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 That the Committee note the work carried out by the Children in Care Council, the purpose, and the role of the Children in Care Council, and to establish what corporate parents need to do to help the Children in Care Council achieve their aims and objectives

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 The Children in Care Council is a group for young people who are care leavers or currently cared for by Thurrock Council. It is facilitated by Open Door and gives children and young people the chance to shape and influence the parenting that they receive at every level and the opportunity to have a say about the things that really matter in their lives. The group helps to shape the overall strategy for Children Looked After and Care Leavers.

This report provides a summary of the work carried out by the Children in Care Council over the period of one year specifically from August 2021 until August 2022

- 2.2 Open Door, an independent services provider, are commissioned by Thurrock Council to ensure the members of the Children in Care Council (CICC) are able to meet at regular intervals, currently monthly and discuss, debate and be consulted about various issues and possible Policy changes. The CICC is open to young people whether they are currently a Child Looked After or care experienced. The role of the Council is to be consulted on many varying issues that may be put to them. They have been asked to provide their collective views on a range of issues, this year these included COVID and vaccination discussions, promotion of CICC through a new animation video and a range of other issues. This is arranged by a request being made through the Project Worker asking for a slot on the Agenda to attend a meeting to ask specific questions. The subject of the discussion and the questions are put to members prior to the visit to ensure the members are fully aware of what is being asked of them.

In addition to our members, CICC also has a regular attendee, Carly Banks who is the Thurrock Participation Officer. Briefly, her role is to ensure the young people are being listened to should they wish to raise any issues that may be affecting young people in care generally and to bring information to the members about any events or changes that may be happening in the future. She also takes information about issues discussed back to Management in Thurrock.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 The report is required to update Thurrock Council of the progress of the Children in Care Council and its findings and plans to ensure the voice of the child is truly being heard.
- 3.2 This report includes a period of transition as the previous worker has now retired and the project has recently been taken over by a very enthusiastic and experienced worker who has a good knowledge of the care system and wishes to see the group develop to a larger more participatory group which can not only be consulted with but one that can also bring CICC issues to the attention of the Council. With the support of local authority and the joint meetings which have been attended we see the CICC going from strength to strength.
- 3.3 As previously stated our group meets monthly but we have capacity to include speciality meetings for example to any newly elected Counsellors of Thurrock to meet with CICC and to discuss the specific roles of each elected Cllr and how it may impact on the life of a young person in care or as a care leaver. This would also enable the members to ask questions around any issues or thoughts they may have about the future and hopefully reach a collaboration between the two for future good practice.
- 3.4 Our meetings are run by the Chairperson who was elected by votes from the members and is Christopher Bennett. Christopher runs the agenda to ensure

we keep to time and do not allow things to run over. Also, he takes minutes and works closely with the Project Worker to produce minutes and the agenda for the next meeting. He attends all Corporate Parenting Committee Meetings and returns to the CICC monthly meetings with interesting updates. Christopher however is now leaving for university, so discussions have begun regarding the election of a new chairperson.

- 3.5 Membership numbers stand currently at around 8 due to a large cohort of previous members transitioning into aftercare and turning 18. After discussions within the CICC they felt that a new younger group would be more productive and be able to provide more insight into life in care currently. We have made great efforts to encourage new members to come forward through various projects including Carly Banks Participation Officer who has worked with an animation company who, alongside some young people, have put together a short, animated video. She briefed the members about this project, and they were very interested as they would like to encourage new members of all ages to attend our meetings going forward. We have also created new promotional items such as leaflets which include a rewritten introduction by the current CICC members. Please see details below:

Hello!

We are a friendly group of young people who are or have been in care. This meeting is ours; we chair it ourselves and decide what we want to talk about and what affects us. We sometimes have guests like senior managers from Thurrock Council who want to hear our voice and keep us updated with any changes that might have been made because of us. This feels good because we are being listened to. Our experiences can help make a difference for other young people in care.

OUR VIEWS AND OUR VOICES ARE IMPORTANT.

We meet once a month in Grays or you can join online if you can't make it in person. You should join the Children in Care Council because you can connect with new people, make friends, have fun but also have your say and make a change. Since being in the group, we have grown in confidence and received lots of support. Most of all we don't feel 'different' because we all know what it is like to be in care.

We hope to see you soon and make a difference together!

From,

The Children in Care Council"

- 3.6 During the pandemic we were able to continue with the CICC meetings via zoom. Due to the success of this we have continued to offer the opportunity for hybrid meetings, this allows members of the CICC who are placed out of the borough to still join remotely and have their voice heard.
- 3.7 The CICC have a cohort of 8 members currently and some previous older CICC members who attend when they can. Generally the average attending each meeting is 5. The age varies from 15 upwards, 50% are male and 50% are female. One young person was asked to write a small entry for this report on their short time at CICC.

“I joined the CICC three months ago after my mentor spoke to me about it. I have already been involved in discussions around COVID and how that affected me living in foster care as well as helping to make decisions for upcoming events. I like that I can have my say and make a difference”

- 3.8 The project worker attends the monthly meetings with Carly Banks of the Go East- Eastern Region Participation Leads where many topics of interest to CICC are discussed and this information is taken back to the monthly meetings. These form Agenda Items for discussion with group members. This enables us to ensure that Thurrock CICC are also dealing with Regional issues that come to light. The CICC representative also attends local focus groups and ensures, during the CICC meetings, that young people are being respectful of each other, and they allow everyone to have their say. Recently a buddy system has been agreed for the group to ensure any new members voices are not overtaken by more confident speakers. The buddy is to make a space for the new young person to be heard.
- 3.9 The CICC are also due to be taking part in some scheduled social events to help combat isolation and make it more of an attractive group for young people to join. Some of these events used to take place pre-covid and will be reintroduced. Young people will be asked to identify a number of areas they would wish to discuss further over the coming year such as Mental Health, transport etc.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 To ensure members are aware of the work carried out by the Children in Care Council.

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

- 5.1 We have continued with the questionnaire that visitors to the group should complete before a meeting was agreed . This has proved to be helpful and assist the group in knowing what to expect from the visitor and allow them to respond accordingly.
- 5.2 The group have confirmed that they enjoy the group and also the social element this provides.
- 5.3 The agreed CICC WhatsApp group works well and allows members to get regular updates especially if members are unable to attend.
- 5.4 CICC have and continue to discuss issues such as COVID and its impact, the transitions of coming into and leaving care, local amenities for young people of Thurrock as well as many other subjects.

5.5 Due to a period of transition we have not had any Thurrock Council visitors attend the most recent meetings but another staff member from Open Door have attended to ask for the CICC's views on some upcoming events. We hope that this will change going forward as we continue to promote and improve the current CICC. It is still agreed that a maximum of 30 minutes is assigned for guests to attend.

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

6.1 When making key decisions about corporate policies the impact of decisions on young people and our corporate parenting responsibilities should be considered and our children and young people prioritised.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **David May**
Strategic Lead Finance

No financial implications

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**
Interim Deputy Head of Legal Services (Social Care and Education)

The Council must have regard to the corporate parenting principles in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 which include:

(a) to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people.

(b) to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.

(c) to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people.

(d) to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.

(e)to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people.

(f)for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.

(g)to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
Community Engagement and Project
Monitoring Officer

The Service is committed to practice, which promotes inclusion and diversity, and will carry out its duties in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and related Codes of Practice and Anti-discriminatory policy

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, or Impact on Looked After Children)

Prioritisation of Corporate Parenting will have a direct impact on the outcomes for Children who are Looked After.

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):

- Children and Social Work Act 2017

9. **Appendices to the report**

- None

Report Author:

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Charlotte Hearn Co-ordinator