

Participation Report

To: Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee

Meeting Date: 20th March 2024

From: Service Director, Quality Assurance and Practice Improvement

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: No

Executive summary: To ensure children and young people in care are empowered to express their voices and experiences to improve services. This report outlines the participation work with children and young people.

Recommendation: The Sub-Committee is recommended to:

- a) Note the contents of the report.
- b) Raise any queries with the lead officers.

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1. Creating a greener, fairer and more caring Cambridgeshire

- 1.1 This report relates to ambition 7 of the Council's seven ambitions as participation activity supports our children and young to have opportunities to thrive.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Participation Team is responsible for supporting Cambridgeshire County Council Children's Services in gathering and responding to the voice of children and young people in care, and Care Leavers. They do this directly by offering a variety of opportunities for engagement and feedback, supporting participation groups with projects and consultations, and ensuring action is taken as a result of feedback from children and young people. They also do this indirectly by supporting the work of the wider service.

3. Main Issues

- 3.1 The Participation Strategic Group was implemented in December 2023 and will meet quarterly going forward. This group is chaired by the Service Director for Quality Assurance and Practice Improvement and has the following objectives:
- To develop an organisational culture of valuing children and young people's views and be proactive in facilitating their participation and keeping them at the centre of everything we do, listening and acting on their views and opinions.
 - To provide a framework, guidance and activities for our organisation to effectively involve children and young people in the development, delivery and evaluation of services that affect their lives.
 - To increase the number of children and young people in our services who have had opportunities to participate in both corporate parenting subcommittee meetings and activities and events, including those children placed at a distance.
 - To ensure that structures are in place to embed best practice relating to engagement, participation / co-production and that we as an organisation are responsive to the issues or concerns that have been highlighted by children and young people.
 - To encourage managers and practitioners to develop and embed participation / co-production in their service area and keeping them informed of activities through regular communication.
- 3.2 The Participation Team continues to promote opportunities for children and young people through regular newsletters, as well as creating event-specific publications to encourage engagement. Recent newsletters have updated young people on the work of the Children in Care Council (CiCC), Care Experienced Forum (VOICE) and other participation groups including the Young Recruiters and Young Trainers. They have also promoted other

relevant opportunities with external organisations such as *IMO* (the Children's Commissioner's digital offering for teenagers in care and care leavers) and *Become* (the national charity for children in care and care leavers).

- 3.3 All feedback, including suggestions and ideas from children and young people, is communicated to services on a regular basis. This is compiled in the Quarterly Feedback Loop Report. Responses on action taken is shared with the CiCC for final review.
- 3.4 The previously named Informal Corporate Parenting Subcommittee has, following consultation with the CiCC, been renamed to the Young People's Corporate Parenting meeting. Our children wanted this change to reflect that this is their meeting. Young people have also shared their view on the current venue for this meeting and work is underway to see what changes are possible.
- 3.5 The Corporate Parenting Strategy is currently under review and the Participation Team have supported our children to be involved in this process. This work has enabled our children to review and prioritise the five key areas of the strategy and they are co-producing the foreword for the strategy. The Participation Team is also running a competition to design the front cover of the strategy.
- 3.6 Cambridgeshire County Council has renewed their contract with Mind of My Own to provide their online messaging and support platform for young people. The Participation Team are supporting the wider service with integrating the use of Mind of My Own into their practice, including coordinating train the trainer and practitioner learning sessions. They are also supporting young people to share their feedback via the app. Further information about Mind of My Own is available here www.mindofmyown.org
- 3.7 Throughout December, the Participation Team organised seasonal drop-ins for care leavers at five different locations across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, with support from the leaving care service. Young people were able to access information about Participation groups, talk to a PA, pick up a free food hamper and an additional shopping voucher for a supermarket of their choice. Several of the young people who attended the drop-ins have since engaged in Participation groups, or plan to in the near future.
- 3.8 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) and Young People make up an increasing number of our Children Looked After and Leaving Care population. These children and young people often have distinct needs, and it is therefore important for us to capture their unique voices. The Participation Team have been continuing to build relationships with young people from a UASC background, with group visits and workshops being the main method of engagement. These visits have led to involvement in other Participation projects, and we will continue this work to improve relationships and engagement.
- 3.9 An Art Exhibition was held in Cambridge Central Library, in October 2023, to showcase young people's artwork that was created during our summer workshops. Several young

people visited the exhibition to see their work on display, and members of the public were able to view the artwork throughout the day, sparking comments and discussion about the pieces. This collection of art was also on display at the Quality Assurance and Performance Improvement Service Development Day in November 2023.

- 3.10 The CiCC continues to meet in person monthly, to work on projects and consultation requests, meet professionals and give feedback on services. Several CiCC members will soon be expanding their skillset by delivering training workshops to trainee social workers and prospective foster carers, through our Young Trainers group.
- 3.11 The CiCC have agreed on their initial set of questions to kick-start their 'Frequently Asked Questions' project and are awaiting confirmation of the responses from the service, so they can press ahead with their plans for marketing the project to young people. Once the initial questions have been answered and shared with Cambridgeshire young people, the CiCC will look at creative ways of sharing the information more widely, and how they can further develop the project to have the biggest possible impact.
- 3.12 VOICE - Care Experienced Network members have been discussing their experiences and focusing on improving the support and preparation for young people leaving care. The group are working with the Leaving Care Service on developing a Pledge for Care Leavers, to set out areas of support that the service will provide for young people, and for young people to know what to expect from the service.
- 3.13 The Young Trainers group continues to deliver training for prospective foster carers across Cambridgeshire, as part of the Foster Carer Training programme. The Young Trainers will be looking at the overall training programmes for foster carers and social workers, to select other areas that they can contribute towards from a young person's perspective, and to explore ways to develop their current training sessions.
- 3.14 The Young Recruiters have been involved in the recruitment of service manager roles within the Leaving Care Service and Children in Care Social Work Teams.
- 3.15 Children and Young People across Peterborough and Cambridgeshire have worked on the 'Every Word Matters' project, looking at the language used around children with social care experience. The second animated video of the series, entitled 'Who is PEP?', focussing on the language used in schools, is now available on the [Participation Youtube](#) page. This has been shared with the Virtual School, who have included it in their latest training resources.
- 3.16 The Youth Club continues to run monthly in the Fenland area and is gradually increasing in popularity, with further interest coming from renewed efforts from social work teams to promote the Participation offer.
- 3.17 The Bright Spots Surveys have recently been launched. This is a collection of wellbeing surveys for all children and young people aged 4-25 who are or have been looked after by Cambridgeshire County Council. We want all our young people to have the opportunity to

complete these surveys, so lots of work is being done to raise awareness with every child and young person who is or has been looked after.

As children and young people cannot complete the surveys with their carer or allocated worker, work has been undertaken to ensure they have access to a trusted adult to provide support if they require it. This includes people like our Participation Officers, Independent Reviewing Officer's (IRO's), Designated Teachers in Schools, Advocacy Services and Supervising Social Workers of Foster Carers.

4. Alternative Options Considered

Not applicable

5. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

5.1 Sub-Committee are asked to note the report.

4. Significant Implications

N/A.

5. Source documents guidance

5.1 Source documents

None.