

YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

To: Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee

Meeting Date: 09 September 2020

From: Sika Smith – Lead Practice Improvement Manager

Electoral division(s): All

Purpose: Update on the participation of young people for the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee

Recommendation: To comment or provide feedback on the range of consultation events and activities the Participation Service provide for children in care and care leavers.

Officer contact:	Member contact:
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Summary:

- In response to Covid-19 since late March 2020, the Participation Team hosted all activities virtually using TEAMS and more recently ZOOM, including a virtual Summer Activity Programme.
- The Participation Team continue to promote the use of the Mind of My Own APP – offering individual and group training.
- The Participation Team hosted two surveys for children and young people. One surveyed feedback about the virtual Participation News Letters, and one surveyed feedback about their experience of support from children's social care during the pandemic.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee requested an update on the work of the Participation Service at each of its meetings.

This report covers activity from July and August 2020.

2.0 MAIN ISSUES

2.1 Update on Involvement of Young People

Children in Care Council (CiCC) Update

Throughout July and August, we have maintained regular virtual contact with our established Children in Care Council groups and our Care Leaver Forum.

The CiCC groups have met on three occasions throughout this period so far, which has been less frequent because lots of the members have been on staycations with their carers in the summer holiday period. The Care Leavers have met six times through the same period. Members of the CiCC groups have also been attending our Virtual Summer Activity sessions and contributing towards the end of summer Art Exhibition.

The focus of the meetings has been discussions around the Independent Reviewing Officer review process; the importance of being a CiCC member and the positive impact it can have for all young people in care. We have also discussed housing for Care Leavers, transport issues, appropriate support for mental health and the importance of maintaining positive social relationships throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

The experiences, views and feedback from the young people can be found in Appendix 1. This information is shared with senior managers for their consideration and feedback to the young people as to how their views are taken forward and impact practice and service delivery.

3. ALIGNMENT WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES

3.1 A good quality of life for everyone

This corporate priority is explicit throughout the report as it relates to children in care supported by the Council and the experiences of children and young people leaving the Council's care.

3.2 Thriving places for people to live

This corporate priority is explicit throughout the report as it relates to children in care supported by the Council and the experiences of children and young people leaving the Council's care.

3.3 The best start for Cambridgeshire's children

This corporate priority is explicit throughout the report as it relates to children in care supported by the Council and the experiences of children and young people leaving the Council's care.

3.4 Net zero carbon emissions for Cambridgeshire by 2050

There are no significant implications for this priority.

4.0 SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS

None identified

4.1 Resource Implications

N/A

4.2 Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications

N/A

4.3 Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications

N/A

4.4 Equality and Diversity Implications

N/A

4.5 Engagement and Communications Implications

N/A

4.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement

N/A

4.7 Public Health Implications

N/A

Source Documents	Location
None	

Appendix 1

What does being part of the Children in Care Council (CiCC) mean to you?
How do you see your role and the impact it can have on services?
What do you want CiCC meetings to look like when the Covid-19 Pandemic is over?

Themes from Young People's (YP) feedback:

What does being part of the Children in Care Council mean to you?

Some young people said that there are good opportunities to have fun and do new things, and it's "a place where you can express your views and opinions"

Some YP said it's a good platform for us as children in care to get their views and the views of others across, as not everyone wants to share their thoughts or be a representative for others.

Also YP said the CiCC is a nice environment where you can make friends and do fun things.

What would you like the CiCC meetings to be like when lockdown ends?

YP involved all agreed that meeting up in person is better than meeting online. Some YP prefer to have meetings in the school holidays as it is less stressful and doesn't interfere with school work and other commitments.

Being social is an important part of the CiCC and doing fun activities together.

One young person asked about the regional film project and whether it is still happening, which has now been put on hold until after the covid-19 pandemic is over and will aim to start the project up again as young people have put a lot of effort into it so far

Young People's ideas

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Going forward:

As the pandemic restrictions ease, the team is working closely with the CiCC members to design and plan arrangements for face to face meetings to resume at the earliest opportunity.

What are your thoughts about your Child Care Review meetings?

The CICC spoke with Nicola Lloyd – (Independent Reviewing Officer) to discuss their thoughts around their 6 monthly child care review meetings.

Nicola asked the YP how they felt about the review process and if they felt involved enough.

Some YP said they didn't want the process to change, saying they were used to their meetings and liked coming together with the services that support them every 6 months. Nicola gave the YP an option to have the questions asked to them during their review sent to them prior to the meeting to give the YP time to prepare for their review. The YP said no, they are happy attending on the day without time to prepare.

Nicola asked if the YP were happy with where their reviews took place.

Several YP said they like them taking place at home and others said they would prefer them taking place at home rather than at school. When they are scheduled to occur in school the YP have said this makes them feel more different to their class mates.

Nicola asked the YP if they know who attended their meeting and understood why the meetings regularly took place.

Some YP said they would like the professionals that attend their meetings to introduce themselves better and give an explanation of the roles to the YP.

Additional feedback received from YP survey regarding Universal credits

In response to the survey about 'How we are doing', one YP requested a call back from the team and commented that they feel let down where their allowance hasn't matched the national increase in their universal credits benefit (16-17 year olds). During the COVID19 crisis 16-17-year-old who receive universal credits were given an automatic increase of £20 a week to their benefit. However, that age group of children in care in Cambridgeshire did not receive this increase and some young people were left wondering why some of their peers/friends received this increase in benefit but not children in care of Cambridgeshire county council. This young person shared that some young people felt no explanation was offered.

This young person was advised that there were other forms of support that care leavers received which they were aware of also.

It is noted that local authorities did not receive any funding for this, but children's services did put in place additional support to care leavers during the pandemic.

Care Leaver Forum

During July and August, the Care Leavers have had the time to explore their own feelings and discuss any issues arising during the Covid-19.

Key themes summary:

- Some care leavers are lonely and feel they need more support from their PAs. It is not always easy to reach out to their PA and it would be helpful if the PAs made contact more often.
- Some care leavers will face some significant new barriers to be able to access face to face meetings again during/post covid-19, this also extends to finding employment and social meetings.
- Some care leavers are making the most of the free driving lessons scheme in order to be more independent. They are more than willing to make the commitment of taking their theory test first, as in the long term it will help to overcome transport issues that can hold them back from seeking employment.
- The housing stability for some care leavers is always uncertain and this can have a negative impact and lead to never feeling settled as the situation can change at any moment, which is out of their control. Landlords and Housing Agencies changing arrangements last minute can have an ongoing negative effect.
- Care leavers need support from familiar relationships to help their wellbeing. Having a likeminded friend is important and the Care Leavers enjoy talking with each other outside of our group sessions.
- Some care leavers don't have a strong support network and are finding that when they are relied upon by others it adds pressure to deal with other people's issues and takes away time to deal with their own needs. This highlights the importance of having a positive relationship with their PA.

Impact of the group –

- The young people are using the forum effectively to share their views in a relaxed environment with adults who understand the issues that arise when a young person has been looked after and the challenges that they can face when leaving care.
- The young people are now proactively taking forward topics that are important to them to discuss with key officers of the council and being able to share their views on how they may be able to affect service improvement.
- In addition, the young people benefit from improved social skills and developing positive friendships where young people have been able to meet up outside of our meetings and share common interests and hobbies.

Building on the success of our virtual offer, we also held a launch event for children and young people who live in placements at a distance out of county, to explore how those young people can get involved with the CiCC. We are planning a follow-up event in October with a view to establish an Out of County group of representatives for the CiCC.

Summer Activity Programme

The Participation Team joined forces with the Peterborough Participation Team to host this summer fun activity programme for children in care and care leavers using ZOOM platform. Please see Appendix Two for the programme details which ran from 4th to 27th August 2020. This is the first time the participation team has run a summer activity programme and it has been well received with a core of 8 regular attendees. We will use feedback to inform future planning for virtual fun activities to enrich and engage children in care and care leavers in these uncertain times whilst the ability to provide face to face activity based remains precarious.

We had a number of remarkable art submissions in response to some of the Newsletter competitions and this inspired a Virtual Art Exhibition of art completed and submitted by children and young people we work with. Please see Appendix 2 for the details. The exhibition will be streamed on YouTube on 2nd September 2020

[Link to YouTube channel](#)

Survey – ‘How did we do?’

Feedback from children and young people about their experience of contact with social workers and the services and support they have received during the pandemic.

A children and young people’s survey was carried out during June, to understand the impact of Covid-19 on them and whether the support offered was felt to be sufficient.

We had 50 responses from children young people who are open to children’s social care and this included some children in care and care leavers though It was not possible to extrapolate data and analysis specific to children in care and care leavers.

Responses were overwhelmingly positive including services were rated highly in terms of communication with social workers; information about the virus; and support from schools and health overall. Arrangements for involvement in planning / meetings was not as strong overall. Information provided at the start of Lockdown to understand what coronavirus is and the rules of Lockdown was overwhelmingly positive. Feelings about communication of information around the changes remained positive, though slightly less so. Support from schools and colleges received a more positive response than support around health concerns. Of the respondents who considered these topics relevant to them, whilst 82% were ‘Happy’ or ‘Very Happy’ with support from schools and colleges, only 44% said the same for support for health concerns during Lockdown (including anxiety and mental health). Young people living in supported Housing/ Lodgings with a family reported that the majority were ‘Happy’ (7) or ‘Very Happy’ (7) with the support they have received at home, one felt ‘Very Unhappy’, and 4 were neutral. The young person who said that they were ‘very unhappy’ did not wish to receive any follow up and left no contact details.

The scoring was overwhelmingly positive, and Young People provided additional feedback through comments, most of which were also positive. More reflective comments shed light into the challenges around the impact of COVID on their education; access to health support; the variability of arrangements to support from schools; and notably for many care leavers a desire for more frequent visits and contact with their PA’s and this is consistent with the reflections from operational care leaver teams that COVID led to increased isolation and loneliness for many care leavers.

The analysis of the survey findings was shared through a staff briefing with all staff and a managers briefing to senior managers for their consideration of

- How can we identify and be responsive to those young people who would like more frequent contact during the pandemic?
- How do we ensure that social workers and PA's consistently share information we prepare for young people about the pandemic; and the participation offer – like the 'virtual drop in; newsletters etc
- How do we ensure all children and young people are invited to and supported take part in key meetings about their care planning? (By the appropriate mechanism)
- How do we support children and young people to access health support including support with emotional wellbeing / mental health in pandemic times?

We will be able to report the feedback and actions taken in response to the survey in our next report.

Interactive Newsletters

Since the COVID-19 lockdown and suspension of all face to face activities, the Participation Team has joined with the Peterborough Participation Team and we have continued to produce fortnightly interactive newsletters. One for the under 12's, one for teenagers and one for care leavers. The newsletters have included competitions, information regarding help and advice on Covid19 and emotional well-being, fun things to do such as virtual tours of zoos or museums, links to theatre productions and musicals, online courses and training, as well as quizzes and recipe ideas. The aims of the newsletters were:

- to maintain a channel of communication with children and young people in the care of Cambridgeshire County Council (CIC),
- to support CIC to feel comfortable feeding back their experience of Lockdown
- to reduce isolation through provision of helpful information and fun activities
- to promote future engagement in Participation groups.

Survey – Feedback from children in care and care leavers about the virtual News letters:

We conducted a survey to find out children and young people's views about the frequency of the Newsletters, the content and how they wished to be engaged in the Newsletters going forward.

The Newsletters received an overall positive response. It appears to have reached more children in the 12 to 17 age group, but over 18s seem to be valuing it the most with the highest numbers from this age group responding to the survey, reading the newsletter more than once, and providing all of the suggestions on content. Survey results suggest that the content has been well balanced, with the best remembered topic being 'helpful information' (which was mostly in relation to COVID and mental health / emotional wellbeing). All respondents wanted to continue to receive a Newsletter, but the majority consensus was for a frequency of monthly and as a result of this feedback we reduced the frequency to monthly with effect from August 2020. One young person expressed an interest for getting involved in the production of the Newsletters and the team has followed this up.

Networking and embedding participation

We have continued to attend operational based team meetings to share feedback from the children and young people who have engaged in the different activities and events we have hosted, and to share the planned participation activities and how practitioners can support young people getting involved. In this reporting period, the terms of reference for the strategic participation meeting with key senior managers across children's social care has been revised to align with the new four tier model of participation. The group now meets monthly and has as its primary function to support the participation communication strategy; proactively consider and promote co-production opportunities; and aims to increase the number of children and young people engaging in and contributing to the participation strategy.

Mind of My Own

The team continues to offer training and support as a team or on a one to one basis to enhance practitioners understanding in how to use the application to capture the voice of the child. Please see Appendix 1 for an update on Mind of My Own activity in July and August as at 26/08/2020.

Conclusion

We are committed to promoting and encouraging our children in care and care leavers to access various activity based events as the vehicle through which their voices can be heard, and they can also become involved in activities to influence service improvement and development. We are pleased that we have been able to maintain contact with a core group of members through the virtual spaces and there has been more new children and young people coming to events and getting involved. We will continue to work at pace to strengthen our feedback loops to children and young people and evidencing the impact of their contributions and work.

Appendix 1

Mind of My Own Summary

The Participation team continue to offer team training and one to one support.

166 Young people have their own Mind of My Own account and 438 workers with an account. We continue to see a decline in use of the App and we continue to promote the App in the monthly Newsletters, our meetings with teams and our contact with children and young people and their carers.

	JULY 2020	AUGUST 2020
New account sign ups each month	Workers - 3 Young People - 2	Workers - 0 Young People - 2
Number of One statements per month	12	1
MOMO Express Statements per month	1	6
Top 3 subject matters each month MOMO ONE	33% Worker Visit, 25% Foster Care Review, 17% Conference, 17% My Life	100% My Wellbeing
Top 3 subject matters each month MOMO EXPRESS	50% About Me, 50% My Day	50% About me 33% My Education 8% My Life, 8% My Health

VIRTUAL **SUMMERS SORTED!** *For all Children in Care*

All workshops via Zoom

Other virtual activities you might be interested in - all available until 31st August!

SCAVENGER HUNT Tuesday 4 th August @2pm Age: under 12s	XIDUS PAIN Lyric Writing Workshop Wednesday 5 th August @2pm. Age: 12 and over	MAGIC AT HOME Ft. Dave The Clown Thursday 6 th August @2pm. Age: All ages	Just Sing! For all ages, by Cambridgeshire Music	
THE BIG QUIZ Tuesday 11 th August @2pm Age: 12 and over	RAINBOW ART WORKSHOP Wednesday 12 th August @2pm Age: under 12s	LETS GET MOVING Thursday 13 th August @2pm Age: All ages		Discover Arts Award! Age: 5-19, by The Library Presents In Your House
VLOGGING WORKSHOP Tuesday 18 th August @2pm Age: 12 and over	POETRY WORKSHOP Wednesday 19 th August @2pm Age: 10 and over	CARD DESIGN WORKSHOP Thursday 20 th August @2pm Age: All ages		
XIDUS PAIN Lyric Writing Workshop Tuesday 25 th August @2pm. Age: under 12s	OWN YOUR STORY Ft. Sophia (Care Leaver) Wednesday 26 th August @2pm. Age: 12 and over	SIGN LANGUAGE WORKSHOP Thursday 27 th August @2pm Age: All ages		

For more information or to register your place on a workshop, please email us at ciccouncil@peterborough.gov.uk or csc.participation@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

PETERBOROUGH CITY COUNCIL
Cambridgeshire County Council

VIRTUAL **ART EXHIBITION** *Covid Creativity!*

Prizes will be awarded!

Showcase your art creations made during lockdown in a special virtual art exhibition

WEDNESDAY 2ND SEPTEMBER 2020

Send your entries* by **Monday 24th August**
 to: ciccouncil@peterborough.gov.uk or
csc.participation@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

Your artwork here!

* All art including drawings, paintings, digital art, photographs, collages, modelling clay, sculptures, etc. welcome. Please include your name, age and a short description of your artwork.

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