

Corporate Parenting Board

6th December 2021

Children in Care and CLICC Strategy and Plan

Choose an item.

Portfolio Holder: Cllr A Parry, Children, Education, Skills and Early Help

Local Councillor(s): Cllr

Executive Director: T Leavy, Executive Director of People - Children

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Report Status: Public

Recommendation:

That members of the Corporate Parenting Board endorse that recommendations in Section 4 of this report.

Reason for Recommendation:

The recommendations in this report are to strengthen and develop the relationship between the CLICC group and CPB so that we are able to work together better on the solutions needed for our care experienced children and young people.

1. Executive Summary

This paper sets out how we carry out our responsibility as a corporate parent to listen to and respond to the children in our care and our care leavers. Members are asked to consider how these views will inform both strategic decisions for these children and young people and how officers will be accountable for changing practice accordingly. Members are asked to consider how they respond to the views of children and young people and how they can use their influence to improve the experience of being in care and being a care leaver.

2. Financial Implications

Whilst some recommendations may incur a cost, they are achievable within our current budget.

3. Well-being and Health Implications

Giving young people a voice in issues that affect them helps to ensure that services are better able to support them and therefore improve their wellbeing. Having a voice also helps to make young people feel that they belong, that they are valued and that their contributions matter and provides young people with an opportunity to develop a wide range of skills that can be useful right into adulthood.

4. Climate implications

There will be an impact on the climate when CPB members are attending groups and activities where young people meet together. Car sharing where possible, would reduce this impact.

5. Other Implications

Not applicable.

6. Risk Assessment

Having considered the risks associated with this decision, the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: LOW

Residual Risk: LOW

7. Equalities Impact Assessment

Our care experienced children and young people are a vulnerable group in themselves. We will provide additional support to those who have additional needs or disabilities and those who experience low emotional wellbeing and poor mental health to enable them to participate.

8. Appendices

None

9. Background Papers

None

1. Context

- 1.1 A key tenet of our responsibilities as a corporate parent is that we listen to and respond to the children in our care and our care leavers. This paper sets out how we intend to do this going forward.
- 1.2 Members are asked to consider how these views will inform both strategic decisions for these children and young people and how officers will be accountable for changing practice accordingly. Dorset is ambitious in ensuring our Corporate Parenting role is shaped and co-produced in dialogue with our children and young people.
- 1.3 Members should be aware that this Youth Voice service has recently come back 'in house' having been provided by an external provider, Participation People, for several years. The team is made up of a Youth Voice Manager and two Youth Voice Officers, one of whom has TUPE'd in from Participation People. The change in arrangements provides an opportunity to reflect on how we carry out our responsibility to involve children in care and care leavers in decision making whilst ensuring there is continuity with programmes and activity which has been effective previously.
- 1.4 In capturing the voice of children in care and our care leavers a balance is needed between ensuring effective governance arrangements for the Corporate Parenting Board and ensuring children and young people feel comfortable in giving their views and feeling listened to. To achieve this, a range of opportunities will need to be available, both formal and informal, and members are asked to be flexible in how children and young people's views inform decisions.
- 1.5 Key to this will be the redevelopment of the long established CiC Council (CLiCC) and Care Leaver Forums. The previous provider struggled with the numbers of young people and membership has further dropped since the transfer. The Youth Voice Team is working hard to recruit new members but in order to represent the range of experiences of our children in care and care leavers, it will be important to see these groups in terms of a range of activities rather than as formal entities with designated representatives.
- 1.6 In early 2020, Children's Services launched a Co-Production Framework, underlining our commitment to develop services with those that use them; children and young people, parents and carers, and stakeholders. The Framework was developed in partnership with Dorset Youth Council, the Dorset Parent Carer Council and key stakeholders. Part of this work included a toolkit which included a range of resources that commissioners and managers can use when making changes to provision.

2 Principles

- 2.1 Dorset has already made a commitment under the title of the Dorset Promise which built on a previous commitment known as the Dorset Pledge, which was developed closely with young people. The Dorset Promise included eight commitments to children in care and care leavers:
 - A safe and stable home
 - Help them to do well in education and find training and employment
 - Keep them safe and support them in staying safe
 - Work together and guide them into adulthood
 - Be honest, kind and reliable
 - Listen to them and act on what they say
 - Provide and advise them on opportunities to enjoy life

- Help them to be aspirational about their lives

In addition to this the Dorset Pledge included a specific commitment to support them to stay healthy and live a healthy lifestyle, which was not included in the Dorset Promise. The children in care and care leavers that were involved in the work to develop the Dorset Pledge would like this to be added to the Dorset Promise.

3 Plans going forward

3.1 Formal - There are existing formal structures where we would want direct involvement of children and young people:

- Corporate Parenting Board – Members are asked to consider how children and young people can contribute to formal meetings. CPB meetings should have the young person's voice at the start of the agenda. We are proposing that children and young people will be invited to attend to present any updates to report cards and progress in co-production work, but if they choose not to attend, the youth voice team will present on their behalf. They then have the choice to leave if they do not want to attend the full meeting. In addition, it is proposed that this replaces the Challenge Cards which have been used in the past. The report cards will be produced jointly with the CLiCC or the Care Leavers Forum and the relevant officers concerned.
- Care Leaver Delivery Group – This group is already up and running and is leading on key work strands for Care Leavers as identified by the New Belongings programme and the commitment to Care Leaver Covenant. The group will be advised by the Care Leaver Forum to ensure actions are co-produced. The Youth Voice Manager is part of the group.
- Harbour Board – The Head of Service for Children in Care and Care Leavers is keen to develop a mechanism for young people to steer and advise the development of the Harbour and the delivery model. Although not every young person supported by the Harbour will be a child in care, we can often find this cohort of young people difficult to engage and therefore it is important that their voices are heard both from a Corporate Parenting Board perspective as well as the wider work of Youth Voice Team. The Youth Voice Manager will be part of the group.
- Virtual School – The Virtual School is keen to develop a 'School Council' to ensure that the young people they work with are actively involved in decision making. The Virtual School staff team will work closely with the Young Voice team to ensure we are sharing messages from young people and not asking too much from a small group of young people.
- Training for Elected Members – The Youth Voice team will provide training for members on what it is like to be a child or young person in care and the range of experiences that children and young people may have.

3.2 Informal – Alongside the formal structures of the Corporate Parenting Board, the Youth Voice Team will make use of a blend of informal approaches, which will enable children and young people to access the ones which work for them. It can take time to build trust and a variety of communication methods, and creative approaches will be used to make the team as visible and approachable as possible. This will include sending mail, SMS, and social media campaigns.

- 3.2.1 A whole family approach will be tried over the next year to enable carers and their birth children to attend activities alongside the children in care that they provide foster care for. Consultation is taking place with the DFCA (Dorset Foster Carers Association) via WhatsApp to have conversations about what might and might not work. This approach aims to remove some of the barriers for our younger children CIC to get involved and to hear the voices of birth children too, who may wish to join our Youth Council which is for all children in Dorset. The whole family approach will also offer carers the chance to meet other carers, having their own space at activities or supporting children to join in. This is also important so that children with SEND who need support, can access what we offer. We will work with the fostering team to offer informal support for carers over coffee and cake.
- 3.2.2 A range of engagement tools will be used to hear the voice of children and young people who do not wish to attend meetings or activities. This might include use Slido, Mentimeter, Miro, Padlet and Forms, which they can access in their own space, in their own time. We will also group text links using Gov.Uk, to these platforms.
- 3.2.3 The Youth Voice team will be reaching out to young people wherever they are and will attend their spaces wherever possible. This might include young people's housing projects or residential settings including the Harbour, for example
- 3.2.4 Members of CPB will be invited to engage with our children in care and care leavers in more informal settings where the children and young people are more comfortable. The Youth Voice team will be creating a schedule for these opportunities and members will be invited to reserve a place at all CLiCC meetings and activities. The purpose of these sessions will be that members can work out solutions to issues together with children and young people, rather than responding to an issue raised in the formal CPB meeting. The Youth Voice Team will be developing a co-produced charter to provide guidance for members about children and young people expectations for how this will work.
- 3.2.5 The Virtual School have their own school council. Colleagues in both teams will work together to ensure that the best use of time is considered for children and young people, and their carers', and that resources are shared where it makes sense to do so.

4 Recommendations

- 4.1 The Youth Voice Manager is a standing member of Corporate Parenting Board and Care Leaver Delivery Group.

- 4.2 Using the proposals outlined in this paper, the Corporate Parenting Board adopt a charter designed with CLICC outlining how children and young people would like members to be involved with their groups, hear their voice, and support their campaigns for change.
- 4.3 A delivery plan for the Dorset Promise is co-produced with children in care and care leavers and is adopted by the Corporate Parenting Board so that children and young people can hold the board accountable and work with them on solutions. This would form the basis of the report cards which children and young people bring to the Corporate Parenting Boards
- 4.4 Youth Voice and Fostering Team to embed the culture of participation better with our carers and work together to hear the voice of the whole family. Progress on this approach will be reported back to the board in six months
- 4.5 Youth Voice Team to visit the Harbour project homes to build relationships with CYP and amplify their voice. The team can support colleagues in the project with consultation and co-production with their CYP.
- 4.6 Officers across the Children's Services workforce to complete co-production training to ensure this is done in line with children and young people's expectations and that co-production work is as effective as possible in delivering the changes that children and young people ask for.
- 4.7 Children and young people that want to, including those with SEND, will be trained in co-production.
- 4.8 The Youth Voice Team develop a mechanism for young people to have 'peer-to-peer' conversations in a way which is safe and can be monitored by the Youth Voice team. This will allow children and young people to collaborate on projects together.
- 4.9 Dorset Council elected members are offered training facilitated by the Youth Voice team to understand what is like to be a child in care and understanding their experience.
- 4.10 All members of Corporate Parenting Board will commit to attending training outlined above.

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Footnote:

Issues relating to financial, legal, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.