

REPORT TO:	Corporate Parenting Panel 9 November 2016
AGENDA ITEM:	6
SUBJECT:	Engagement with Croydon's Looked After Children
LEAD OFFICER:	Barbara Peacock, Executive Director of People Department
CABINET MEMBER:	Alisa Flemming, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Learning
WARDS:	ALL
CORPORATE PRIORITY/POLICY CONTEXT:	
A caring city: Provide safer, high quality, integrated healthcare and social care services close to home with a focus on maternity, children and young people, and mental health services. Corporate Parenting.	
FINANCIAL IMPACT	
To be confirmed.	
FORWARD PLAN KEY DECISION REFERENCE NO: N/A	

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 Corporate Parenting Panel to note the report, which is an update and proposal on arrangements for engaging Looked After Children and Care Leavers.

1.2 Corporate Parenting Panel to support the recommendations set out in section 7 of this report.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2.1 This report is in response to the Panel's request for a report on engagement with Looked After Children. The Local Authority want to ensure that Croydon's Looked After Children (LAC) and Care Leavers are actively engaged and fully participate in decision making about the services and organisations that routinely involve them. This report updates members on current and recent activity and proposes that we need to develop a strategic approach to drive future engagement and participation for LAC and Care Leavers to facilitate this process.

3. DETAIL

Recent Activity

3.1 Engagement activity relating to Children in Care and Care Leavers has taken place in a number of ways.

3.2 In early 2016 young people in care were directly involved in procurement and commissioning activity related to the tendering of provider services for placements for Looked After Children.

3.3 Young people have been involved in interviewing permanent social workers for the service for the last three years though this practice is not yet consistent across children's services.

3.4 Young people were consulted as part of the development of the 0-25 disability service.

3.5 We have involved Looked After Children and their families in the recent 'Practice Week' initiative. A preliminary report detailing outcomes and next steps is expected in late November.

3.6 A report detailing complaints from children in care and those representing them has been discussed at this panel. There are examples of changes in practice as a result of this engagement with service users.

3.7 Young people have access to the Independent Visitors service managed by Barnado's and commissioned by the Local Authority.

3.8 Feedback from Return Home Interviews for young people who have been missing is collated and informs service delivery, including the quality assurance process of foster and residential care and provision for semi-independence.

3.9 A questionnaire was distributed to all Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children at the beginning of this calendar year order to consult them on the quality of service they are experiencing and result collated to inform service need.

3.10 The Children in Care Council has operated in several different ways over the last few years. There have been some successes. The Children in Care Council (CiCC) reviewed the Pledge to Croydon's LAC and Care Leavers in 2014. That review was presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel. Additionally, it was the CiCC that raised the profile of the needs of Care Leavers across the Housing Department.

3.11 Over Summer 2015, the lead staff for youth participation within the Department undertook a piece of work to engage young people in care in two age groups to support them to develop their views about how they might be engaged in the Children in Care Council.

In short, there were some challenges in getting young people involved in this piece of work. It included helping them to understand how they might be involved in democratic

processes, how they might have a voice for LAC and Care Leavers and how they might choose to organise and structure themselves.

It is noted that the above was a one piece off work added to an existing role.

3.12 The major reason that the Children in Care Council has yet to succeed as it might in Croydon is because there is no dedicated resource to oversee it.

Officers have recognised the need to develop a post. This does not need to be a full time post and in fact could be a Care Leaver in the medium to long term. In the short term a person or organisation with the relevant skill set is required, to develop the strategy and processes and key links that will create a sustainable approach. Such experience exists within the Council's Early Intervention Support Services but needs to be supported by resources. A piece of work will begin before the end of the calendar year to develop an apprenticeship role to oversee young people's engagement across the Children and Family Early Intervention and Children's Social Care Services. It is hoped to be a full time post and will afford dedicated time to the development of the Children in Care Council.

4. Current Activity

4.1 The current Children in Care Council is managed by staff in the Leaving Care Service with no additional resource or support. In fact, there are 7 - 10 regular attenders each month. On 25th October 2015 there were 7 young people. All of the young people in attendance are Care Leavers. There is no regular attender aged under 18. There is limited strategy or direction to this meeting though some of the young people do recognise the need for 'structure' (their word).

4.2 On 25th October the CiCC were asked if they would consider reviewing Croydon's Pledge to Children in Care with a view to assisting them to consider their future priorities. The young people have agreed to begin this work at their next meeting.

4.3 It is noted that there has been no representative Care Leaver on Croydon's Fostering Panel for some time. At the last Corporate Parenting Panel in September 2016, at least one young person expressed a wish to be involved. The Fostering Panel and Fostering Service will explore this with a view to recruiting early in 2017.

4.4 Further to the last Corporate Parenting Panel, young people were asked to think about how they might be involved in consultation about the health services experienced by young people in care. There is at least one young person who is very keen to lead on this.

The above are opportunities that need to be supported by a wider strategy.

5. Future Strategy

5.1 Our strategy will be underpinned by the following principles:

- The recognition that LAC and Care Leavers have a right to positively contribute as decision makers and that services, organisations and corporate parents have a responsibility to ensure they are given this opportunity
- The aspiration to make a positive difference to the lives and experiences of Croydon's LAC through enabling them to be true partners in democratic processes
- To build LAC capacity for involvement in the future and ensure they are recognised (and recognise themselves) as valued members of the wider community
- Croydon's LAC have a range of enjoyable, accessible and relevant opportunities for their positive engagement in service design and delivery in Croydon.
- Our engagement activities will:
 - Use imaginative and responsive approaches to achieve maximum impact.
 - Ensure that our approaches to engagement are proportionate and uses available resources to best effect.
 - We will share information with others and avoid duplication.
- To report outcomes of engagement as appropriate and use them to help shape directorate, corporate and partnership planning.
- Positively promote LAC and their achievements.

5.2 This Framework will enable Croydon to:

- Develop strong, strategic, multi-agency leadership and vision to put LAC children and young people at the heart of services
- Enable LAC to have a voice in service provision and their local community and democratic processes
- Collaborate with key partners to develop a strategic approach to ensure that LAC are offered a wide range of meaningful opportunities for their positive engagement
- Promote the benefits of LAC engagement
- Co-production – offering meaningful opportunities for LAC to be involved in and influence decision making in relation to policies, service design and service commissioning.

6. Our proposed priorities:

Priority one: Ensure that LAC have equal opportunity to have their say in decisions that affect their lives

What we are going to do:

- **Better understand existing engagement opportunities and recent best practice** We will identify current best practice, gaps in engagement and upcoming opportunities for meaningful engagement activities. For example, by looking at existing participation and engagement forums for LAC across London and Nationally and identifying appropriate initiatives.
- **Identify and provide a variety of effective methods for active engagement** In partnership with LAC we will apply the most suitable methods for the LAC and review our current strategies for social media. For example, young people

engaged in the development of this strategy want to be engaged via various digital means, user panels and as part of wider events.

Priority two: Improve the way we manage and undertake engagement activity for LAC across the directorate

What we are going to do:

- **Improve engagement skills and support**
We will share skills, knowledge and best practice within the council and our wider partnerships to support those undertaking engagement activities with LAC and Care Leavers. For example, build links with partners in schools and the voluntary sector.
- **Increase involvement of elected members and other politicians**
We will support each LAC to engage with the communities they represent and council decision making. We will support elected members to engage with and consult Looked After Children and Care Leavers.
- **Improve the way we manage and co-ordinate engagement with LAC**
We will do this by working collaboratively within corporate arrangements, sharing learning from engagement and making the best use of available resources.
- **Provide timely feedback on the results and outcomes of engagement**
We will ensure that LAC know that their voices have been heard and what, if anything, we are doing as a result.

Priority three: Ensure that learning from engagement shapes service planning and delivery

What we are going to do:

- **Promote and embed our engagement pathway**
We will do this using learning gained from engagement to routinely shape services in terms of service planning, delivery, commissioning and evaluation.
- **Measure the impact of engagement**
We will develop suitable approaches to evaluating the impact on services and outcomes for CLA

7. Recommendations

1. To identify a specific youth resource to support LAC youth engagement and participation. This is likely to involve exploration of an Apprenticeship scheme.
2. To develop a framework for LAC engagement and participation in collaboration with the key stakeholders such as: Virtual School, Youth Service, Youth Offending Service, Fostering and Semi-independence Providers, Early Intervention Services and Schools. This is likely to be part of a wider engagement strategy for children and young people who use our services.

8 FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 To be confirmed. There is likely to be a cost implication in recruiting an Apprentice.

9. COMMENTS OF THE COUNCIL SOLICITOR AND MONITORING OFFICER

9.1 N/A

10. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT

10.1 No adverse impact.

11. EQUALITIES IMPACT

11.1 N/A at this stage.

12. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

12.1 N/A

13. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPACT

13.1 N/A

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BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Not applicable