

Corporate Parenting Board

3 December 2012

Report of the Assistant Director, Children's Specialist Services

Looked After Children's Strategy – Respect and Involvement

Summary

1. One of the clearest and loudest messages from our Looked After Children is that they be treated with respect and included in all the decision making that effects their lives. Our Looked After Children strategy captures this commitment stating:

“All those involved with children and young people treat them with respect, listen to their views and are reliable and trustworthy. Children and young people are involved in, and understand, the decisions made about their lives. They know how to get the information, advice and support they need, and how to complain”
2. An undertaking has been made by the officers and members of the council and its partners to children and young people
 - You will have your own social worker who is reliable, trustworthy and who will listen and treat you with respect.
 - You will be made aware of your rights, choices and the things you are entitled to, including your right to complain if you are unhappy.
 - We will arrange your child care reviews in a way that best suits you and covers the things that are important to you.

Background

What we know about children and young people's experience:

Nationally (Ofsted Children's Care Monitor 2010)

3. Items noted

- 53% of children and young people said their opinion was usually/always sought on things that mattered to them.
- 15% said that their opinion is not usually/never sought.
- 51% thought their opinions make a difference to the decisions about their lives.

Nationally (Children on Independent Reviewing Officers 2011)

4. Items noted

- 71% who had an IRO said they knew how to contact their IRO, and 29% said they didn't know how to contact them.

5. What we have done so far:

- We have two active groups, Show Me That I Matter (SMTIM) aged 11 and over, and I Matter Too (IM2) aged 8-11, of children and young people in which they can talk about their experiences and wishes to responsible people, including councillors, and influence decision-making.
- Children and young people have taken part in a research consultation exercise with York University to inform the City of York Council's Pledge, and participated in the making of 2 DVD to promote this.
- Reviewing officers are improving participation in reviews by encouraging children and young people to chair and/or evaluate their reviews.
- All newly Looked After Children receive an introductory visit from their IRO to explain the role.
- The Children's Rights and Advocacy Service provides volunteer advocates when requested, and provides advice and support, including at reviews.
- It has also set up a Facebook page and is developing a children and young people's website.

Consultation

6. Staying in regular close contact with all of our Looked After Children and finding proactive and dynamic opportunities for them to express their views and to be involved is at the heart of our consultation approach.
7. The Children's Rights and Advocacy Service have run sessions with young people to enable the greater engagement of a wider group of looked after children. Two key events were the Celebration Event at the Global Centre and the Picnic in Rowntrees Park.
8. Through this consultation approach we are able to gather the important messages from our Looked After Children and with them identify what the Council and its partners should be doing to improve their outcomes and their overall experience of care.
9. Our work with our Looked After Children over the past two years has highlighted some new issues and reinforced some familiar ones. Overall it is clear our Looked After Children are unanimous in their wish for inclusion in all of the decision making about their specific care and more broadly in any service developments that may impact on their peers.
10. The young people's work to develop a Council pledge for all Looked After Children highlighted some very specific issues to be addressed and improved.
11. Children and young people are involved in, and understand, the decisions made about their lives. They know how to get the information, advice and support they need, and how to complain.
 - Children and Young People will have their own social worker who is reliable, trustworthy and who will listen and treat them with respect.
 - Children and Young People will be made aware of their rights, choices and the things they are entitled to, including their right to complain if they are unhappy.

- We will arrange children and young people's child care reviews in a way that best suits them and covers the things that are important to them.

Locally (CYC Pledge Consultation 2011)

12. Items noted

- Children and young people want social workers who care, are reliable and will listen and treat them with respect.
- They want more information about what is going to happen to them and where they are going to live.
- They think their reviews can be long, boring and repetitive, and their views don't make much difference.
- They liked the experience of being consulted as a group, and want to do more of it.

Locally (CYC Quality Assurance data)

13. Items noted

- Too few children and young people are directly consulted by the reviewing officer before their review
- 98% of over 5s communicate their views to reviews, mostly by indirect means.

What we are going to do next:

14. Our strategy describes the steps we will take as:

- Extend our current consultation and involvement of children and young people to a wider, more representative group, so that it fulfils the function of a Children in Care Council.

- Ensure all Looked After Children receive a 'Rate My Review' postcard from their IRO to get feedback about their experience of the care planning process.
- Increase the number of children and young people actively participating in their reviews, year on year, and ensure that children and young people feel that their involvement in their reviews has made a difference.
- Find ways of ensuring that care planning decisions, such as change of placement, are not made outside the review process, and that children and young people are involved in these decisions.
- Provide children and young people who are old enough to have them with a copy of their placement plan.

Options

15. Elected members are invited to receive feedback on the delivery these changes. Nikki Wilson, Children's Right's officer and Michelle Howlett will be attending the Board today to describe the work underway to deliver the changes described above and to report on progress. They have invited young people from Show Me That I matter Panel to join them and meet the Corporate Parenting Board.

Analysis

Our Response

16. Acting promptly and transparently on the views and requests of our Looked After Children is critical to their ongoing confidence in the people and organisations that contribute to their care. Feeding back to our young people describing any changes that are proposed as a result of their views and, perhaps more importantly, explaining clearly why some changes cannot be made has to be at the heart of our respect and involvement approach.
17. We have described clearly in our strategy and through a variety of supporting tools, DVD's, handbooks and word of mouth how we will

respond to the respect and involvement challenges raised by our Looked After Children.

Council Plan

18. The Corporate Parenting Board will be ensuring that the work of partners for looked after children contributes to the aims of
 - The Children and Young People's Plan
 - Building strong communities
 - Protecting vulnerable people

19. Through the positive outcomes for looked after children , the aim is for them to be able to benefit from and contribute to
 - Get York moving
 - Create jobs and grow the economy
 - Protect the environment

20 Implications

- **Financial** Not applicable
- **Human Resources (HR)** Not applicable
- **Equalities** Not applicable
- **Legal** Not applicable
- **Crime and Disorder** Not applicable
- **Information Technology (IT)** Not applicable
- **Property** Not applicable
- **Other** None

Risk Management

20. There is no major risk in accepting this option. Good progress is being made in ensuring that looked after young people are accorded respect and involved in their decision making.

Recommendations

21. Members are asked to consider the progress that has been made since the establishment of the Show Me That I Matter Panel (Children In Care Council) and agree a timetable for the report from the Children's Right's Officer and the Panel to the Corporate Parenting Board to monitor the effectiveness of the Looked After Children's Strategy 2012-15.

Reason: This will ensure that all those involved with children and young people treat them with respect, listen to their views and are reliable and trustworthy.

Contact Details

Author:

Howard Lovelady
Head of Service
Children's Social Care
01904 555357

Chief Officer Responsible

Eoin Rush
Assistant Director
Children's Specialist
Services
01905 554200

Report Approved

Date 22/11/12

Specialist Implications Officer(s)

Wards Affected: *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers: None

Annexes: None