

ANNEX A

SHOW ME THAT I MATTER YORK'S CHILDREN IN CARE COUNCIL



ANNUAL REPORT 2013-14

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INTRODUCTION

Show Me That I Matter (SMTIM) is the name of York's Children in Care Council (CiCC). York's CiCC hold monthly panel meetings to raise and discuss issues that are important to Looked After Children and young people, with the aim that councillors will help to shape and improve the services for looked after children and young people. Councillor Janet Looker, Lead Member for Children's Services, and Councillor Jenny Brookes attend the panel meetings, along with Nikki Wilson, Children's Rights and Advocacy Officer and Michelle Howlett, Looked After Children Development Officer.

This report will detail the findings, conclusions and actions from the SMTIM panel meetings held in 2013, using the minutes of each SMTIM meeting. Each discussion point from the meetings, and any conclusions or actions on that discussion point, will be outlined.

PANELS: SMTIM AND WE TALK 2

SHOW ME THAT I MATTER

York's CiCC consists of experienced young people, aged between 14 and 19, and they convene monthly to discuss issues that are important to looked after children young people. The definition and purpose of the CiCC, the structure and location of panel meetings and the skills and qualities of the CiCC have been prominent topics of discussion at various meetings.

The CiCC have completed exercises to establish their role, and to determine the aims and expectations of a member of the CiCC. They have also looked at what motivates individuals to become members of the CiCC and what skills a member of the CiCC should have. The CiCC have determined that they need to possess these qualities: care experience, reliability, respect (in particular being polite), communication skills, listening skills, confidence and self esteem and patience. It is important for the CiCC to understand their purpose and the skills they need to possess so they can ensure the panel functions efficiently and effectively. Attending panel meetings also gives members of the CiCC the opportunity to gain skills and experience in a professional environment.

At the November panel meeting, participation volunteer Matthew Wotherspoon gave a brief presentation on the skills CiCC members require and how these skills can be promoted when applying for future employment or training. This helps the CiCC use the skills they have gained while being a member of the CiCC in order to shape their future.

YORK'S CICC

YOU SAID

The CiCC have said that they represent children in care in York and they described the panel meetings as “a group where we come together to share views on foster care, a place to share worries and thoughts, to make being in care better, to talk about things that need changing and do something about them”.

For the CiCC to function, members have said that they “need to listen to each other and to talk to the relevant people who make decisions at the council”.

YOU SAID

At the August activity day, the CiCC looked at who within the council they could approach when they would like information/something changing and also what their job role is and how to contact them. The CiCC have also said that when there are guest speakers or councillors at meetings, they would only like to receive small bits of information at a time because they find it easier to process and remember.

SO...

The CiCC have been made aware of the Children's Rights and Advocacy Service and the role which it has at the council. Issues raised with the Rights and Advocacy Service will be taken forward with the relevant people.

PANEL MEETINGS

YOU SAID

Between January and August, the location of the panel meetings was 29 Castlegate. The CiCC said they would like to have a meeting at West Offices to see what the building is like.

SO...

At the August activity day, it was agreed that the next meeting would take place at West Offices so the CiCC could see the building. At the September SMTIM panel, Howard Lovelady took the panel on a tour of West Offices and the panel decided that future meetings would be held at West Offices.

YOU SAID

The CiCC said they would like to have a named chairperson at each meeting, rather than having a different chairperson at each meeting.

SO...

It was agreed that the CiCC would vote for a chair every six months. In September, Shelley was nominated as chair and Luke as vice chair.

YOU SAID

The CiCC said they would like to change the structure of panel meetings. They said they would like more time for preparation on agenda items, particularly as there were a few new members of the CiCC. The CiCC have asked for a reminder at the end of each meeting (and in the post) on the date and agenda of the next meeting.

SO...

A new structure was proposed which allows time for preparation on agenda items; this is to ensure the CiCC have a good understanding of the issues and topics being covered at panel meetings. Having an understanding of the issues and topics enables the CiCC to genuinely participate in discussions and voice their own opinions, rather than agreeing with the majority view.

WE TALK 2

We Talk 2 is a group formed by the union of the Looked After Children's Support Team and the group I Matter 2. The two groups were very similar, with lots of overlap in content covered by the groups, so joining them together was a sensible option.

The Looked After Children's Support Team was formed in 2012 and they helped support the City of York's looked after children and young people, and their families and carers. The team liaised with partner agencies across the city to coordinate and facilitate contact between LAC and their parents and other relatives, support parenting assessments and re-unification plans, as well as helping looked after and adopted children understand and make sense of their own life history.

I Matter 2 is a sub-group of SMTIM and is aimed at looked after children between the ages of ten and fourteen. The group is more informal and activity based than SMTIM, but still allows looked after children and young people to share their views and to raise any issues regarding being in care. Issues raised at I Matter 2 are shared with the CiCC, who are then able to raise these issues with senior managers and councillors.

In March, the role of the Looked After Children's Support Team and aspects of their work were explained to the SMTIM panel. It was discussed that the Looked After Children's Support Team were to liaise and work with I Matter 2. In May, Michelle Howlett updated the CiCC on the arrangements of the LAC's Support Team and the consultation work they were to be doing with I Matter 2 and the LAC's consultation group, which was run by the Looked After Children's Support Team. Discussions were in place regarding the union of the Looked After Children's Support Team with I Matter 2, but this was to occur when Hamilton House, a new location for the meetings, was ready for use. The Looked After Children's

Support Team and I Matter 2 joined in November and meet monthly at Hamilton House. In November, a new name for the group had not been decided, but it was later determined by the group that they would be called We Talk 2.

THE PLEDGE

The Government states that every council should make a set of promises to all its children and young people in care; this is called a Pledge. In York, children and young people were asked what they thought were the kind of promises that should be made to children and young people in care, and the Pledge is based on their feedback.

Throughout the 2013 panel meetings, discussions were held on how to monitor the effectiveness and the functionality of the Pledge. It was proposed that the Pledge could be monitored by interview, and it was decided that a questionnaire was to be put together covering each Pledge point. The suggested names for the questionnaire were *Your Voice* and *U Matter*. The latter was chosen and was developed into the U Matter survey, which is discussed in more detail in the following section within this report.

YOU SAID

The CiCC watched The Pledge DVD so that all members, new and old, understood The Pledge. Feedback from the CiCC was that The Pledge was a too lengthy.

SO...

There are plans are in place to re-do The Pledge, and feedback from the U Matter survey will be used to inform the new Pledge.

A specific point within the Pledge – access to leisure – was raised by the CiCC. The Pledge states ‘You will be able to use the City of York Council’s leisure services, free of charge’. As a result of this, the Council produced a leisure offer to all looked after children and young people, comprising of free council gym and swim membership at Energise and Yearsley Swimming Pool.

YOU SAID

Feedback from the CiCC indicated that there were problems in accessing the free swim and gym membership and there were concerns that not all young people were aware of its existence.

SO...

It was agreed that the Children’s Rights and Advocacy Service would do more to promote the leisure offer, and information continues to be regularly shared with social work teams, in young people’s newsletters, on Facebook and on the SMTIM website.

U MATTER SURVEY

The U Matter survey was developed as a way of monitoring the effectiveness and functionality of the Pledge and was a chance for children and young people in care to inform the Children's Rights and Advocacy Service about their experience of living in care. The survey was available to complete online or via interview: interviews were conducted by professionals, the Children's Rights and Advocacy Service and SMTIM.

YOU SAID

The survey was piloted at the June meeting but feedback from the panel was that the survey was too lengthy.

SO...

Nikki Wilson and Michelle Howlett took the feedback from the panel and made alterations to the survey. The results from the survey will be used to inform the next Pledge.

On 20th September 2013, the survey went live and was available for young people to complete until 31st December 2013. This work concluded at the end of 2013 and the findings will be used to inform the next Pledge.

SHOW ME THAT I MATTER WEBSITE

The website www.showmethatimatter.com was created so that information regarding looked after children and young people was available online and was launched in March 2013. The website provides information for looked after children and young people, as well as for professionals and carers. Councillor Jenny Brookes asked for the link to the site to be sent to all councillors so that all professionals working with children and young people in care were aware of the site.

YOU SAID

Two members of the CiCC said they wanted to view the site and provide feedback.

SO...

The two young people gave their feedback on the site.

Although the SMTIM website has been extremely useful in making information available, the layout, design and content of the website need improving and developing. A plan for the development of the site is underway for 2014.

CONTACT WITH PROFESSIONALS, TEAMS AND PROJECTS

INDEPENDENT VISITORS

Independent Visitors (IVs) are adults who give up some of their free time to support young people who are in care. They are independent as they are volunteers who do not work for the Council. IVs are for looked after children and young people who have little or no family contact, and who would like to have a friendship with an adult who is outside the care system. IVs also provide advice and support to young people in care. The Children Act 1989 requires local authorities to appoint IVs for looked after children in their care.

Nikki Wilson shared information about the Independent Visitors Scheme with the CiCC and it was agreed that a further cohort of volunteers would be recruited to become IVs.

YOU SAID

Members of the CiCC, Ashleigh, Amy and Luke, expressed an interest in interviewing the volunteers for the position of IV. Despite volunteering, none of the young people were available to interview candidates and so a young person's interviewing panel was unable to take place.

SO...

Interviews for IVs were held in July and a cohort of IVs was recruited.

INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICERS

An Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) oversees the care planning and chairs the review meetings for children and young people in care. Each looked after child or young person has an IRO and their IRO should remain the same if possible. An IRO's main job is to ensure that the looked after child or young person's care plan meets their needs and that the voice of looked after children and young people is heard.

YOU SAID

Some members other CiCC said they were unaware of who their IRO was and what their job entails.

SO...

This issue was tackled by arranging for two IROs, Helen Bromley and Claire Mo, to attend the November SMTIM panel meeting to explain their job role and to look at how they can improve review meetings for LAC.

YOU SAID

When the IROs attended the panel meeting, the CiCC had small group discussions about their experiences of reviews and suggested improvements that could be made. The main message from the discussion was that more time should be made for IROs to spend with children prior to their reviews, in order to find out how the child or young person would like the meeting to take place and how they would like to contribute.

SO...

Nikki Wilson was to feedback to senior managers on the CiCC's comments about how to improve reviews for young people.

YOUNG INSPECTORS

The Young Inspectors are a voluntary group of young people from marginalised backgrounds who inspect and report on various services in York and give feedback from a young person's perspective on how the services could be improved. This involves visiting services and interviewing staff and service users. Young people need to be referred by someone in order to become a Young Inspector and referrals are accepted from all organisations.

In January, a discussion on Young Inspectors was held in preparation for the visit of two Youth Support Workers. The two Youth Support Workers, Emma and Jean, were guests at the February panel meeting; they explained the role of a Young Inspector and asked if any members of the CiCC were interested in the programme. The CiCC were to speak to Nikki if they wanted to be involved in Young Inspectors.

CARE4ME SUMMARY REPORT

The Care4Me Summary Report is a national report detailing children and young people's views on being in care. The Office of the Children's Rights and Director (OCD) – currently hosted by Ofsted – managed and administered the Care4me survey, which was sent to local authorities undergoing an Ofsted inspection of their Safeguarding and Looked After Children services. Each local authority conducted their survey separately at the time of their inspection. The Care4Me Summary Report brings together the individual authority results to provide a national overview. The National Overview Report of Children and Young People's Views, which includes the Care4Me Summary Report, can be viewed at www.rights4me.org.

The CiCC were informed of the Care4Me survey in July and how it relates to care in York. They were encouraged to participate in order to voice their views on being in care. The survey was promoted on the SMTIM website and on Facebook in order to get as many

responses as possible. In October, the CiCC looked at the Care4Me summary report and gave their views on the findings.

ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

AUGUST ACTIVITY DAY

An 'away day' was arranged for the CiCC which took place on August 5th 2013 at Bradley Wood Activity Centre. The activity day was attended by six young people and three members of staff. There was no SMTIM panel meeting held in August, due to there being an activity day.

At the July meeting, details of the 'away day', including location – Bradley Wood Activity Centre – were provided and consent forms were distributed to the young people. The 'away day' was described as a development day with a combination of small group work and outdoor activities.

As there was no panel meeting in August, details of the activity day, as an alternative to minutes, were provided.



Young people enjoying the activities at
Bradley Wood Activity Centre

The first outdoor activity was a team building activity involving a group ski walk race and a travel across the swamp exercise. Everyone participated and did extremely well, despite the rain. The second outdoor activity was the high ropes, which included climbing the high ropes and a leap of faith. Indoor group exercises were completed, which included discussions on SMTIM; the outcome of these discussions has been summarised earlier in this report.

The September panel meeting included feedback on the outcomes of the activity day held in August and it was indicated that a training session was to be held for all members who were unable to attend the activity day.

OTHER ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

In December, the CiCC attended an activity day instead of holding a meeting at West Offices. The panel went to Yorkshire's Winter Wonderland, which included activities such as ice skating. At this activity day, the panel said goodbye to Matthew Wotherspoon, participation volunteer, and welcomed Helen Jones as the new participation volunteer.



Young people ice skating at Yorkshire's Winter Wonderland

Takeover Day was discussed by the panel in September. Takeover day is a national event whereby children and young people get the chance to work with adults for a day. It gives

children and young people the chance to experience a work environment and it gives adults a new perspective on their work. The panel agreed that Takeover Day is a good event to take part in but that it should be well planned for 2014.

Throughout the year, there have been a number of regional and national meetings which members of the CiCC have attended, along with professionals. These include:

- A regional CiCC event held in Barnsley on 12th January 2013, attended by two CiCC members and Nikki Wilson
- A national CiCC event held in Leeds on 9th November 2013, attended by two CiCC members, Nikki Wilson, Councillor Brooks and Howard Lovelady.

EDUCATION

VIRTUAL SCHOOL FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

The City of York Council has created a Virtual School to ensure that looked after children and young people receive a high-quality level of support with their education. There is a Virtual Head Teacher and a multi-agency team who work together to track the progress of looked after children and young people and to ensure that they are receiving appropriate support and opportunities.

In July, Trisha Head, the Virtual Head Teacher, attended the SMTIM panel to introduce herself to the CiCC and to describe her role. This gave the CiCC chance to ask questions about Trisha's role, and how she can support looked after children and young people.

The role of a Virtual Head Teacher:

- To work closely with other head teachers and school governors to ensure there is a good understanding of what is important to looked after children and young people.
- To provide training to teachers, head teachers and social workers.
- To work with School Improvement Professionals to raise the standards in schools.
- To work with the Admissions and Access Team to help ensure that moves between schools are reduced.

HEALTH

Looked after children and young people require an initial health assessment within the first 28 days of coming into care and subsequent annual review health assessments.

In May, Sue Roughton and Barbara Stewart attended the SMTIM panel to talk about healthcare for looked after children and young people and to get their views on their involvement with their health assessments. Following the panel meeting, Sue Roughton was to confirm whether young people in higher education were exempt from health care costs, and this was confirmed at the June SMTIM panel meeting.

ISSUES RAISED BY THE CHILDREN IN CARE COUNCIL

TRANSPORT

YOU SAID

The CiCC outlined problems with contacting taxis and discussions took place around whether young people could be involved in the training of drivers.

SO...

This was discussed with taxi companies but was not something they decided to take up.

YOU SAID

The CiCC said that there were problems with bus travel across the city. Currently, young people in care are given a bus pass for designated zones but this causes difficulties when young people change placements or want to access different parts of the city.

SO...

This issue was taken forward by Councillor Looker who has arranged for young people in care to have free bus travel across the city; this will be implemented in April 2014.

APPRENTICESHIPS

YOU SAID

Young people in care said they would like more help in arranging apprenticeships with the City of York Council.

SO...

The Pathway Employment and Training Officer has negotiated that LAC and care leavers will be given priority on City of York Council Level 2 apprenticeships. Initially, apprenticeship vacancies within the council will be advertised to LAC and care leavers. LAC and care leavers who have a successful application and interview will be appointed. If no LAC and care leavers are appointed, the vacancy is advertised publicly.

Further to this, the Pathway Team has met with Human Resources to discuss further opportunities for LAC and young people within the council; these include Level 1 apprenticeships, trainees and work experience opportunities.

OTHER ADVOCACY ISSUES

YOU SAID

Nikki Wilson outlined advocacy issues which young people felt were in need of attention by the CiCC. These included more choice around placements, and better and quicker responses from social workers.

SO...

Donna Barnes, Principle Social Worker responsible for Social Working Practice across Children's Services will be attending the SMTIM panel meeting in March 2014 to address the issue of responses from social workers. Howard Lovelady, Head of Resources in Children's Services and Debra Lane, Fostering Manager, will be attending the SMTIM panel meeting in May 2014 to discuss choices around placements.

VIOLET CHAMBERS FUND

The Violet Chambers Fund is a fund of £20,000 that was left in the will of deceased Miss Violet Chambers to look after children and young people. The fund was discussed by the CiCC in February, where views and ideas were shared on the spending criteria and the application process. It was agreed that funding should be spent on an event or experience that will be 'meaningful or memorable', up to the value of £100. The fund has been divided into two ring-fenced halves, Under 11s and 11+. Both funds are dedicated to provision over and above that normally provided for looked after children and young people and aim to provide cultural, sports and educational experiences and may include theatre trips, activity days, meals out, etc.

11+ Fund

Applications can be made by professionals on behalf of young people or young people themselves, with a supporting professional. Applications are judged by a panel that consists of three young people from CiCC and three professionals (Howard Lovelady - Head of Resources, Nikki Wilson - Children's Rights Officer and Sophie Barnes – Service Support Apprentice). Members of the CiCC can still apply for the fund but will not be able to sit on the deciding panel when their request is being processed.

Under 11s Fund

This fund will be used to provide a day out for those children under the age of 11 and their fostering family. Day passes will be purchased from Piglets Adventure Farm, Monk Park Farm or York Maze and costs will vary depending on the number of children in a family.

YOU SAID

The CiCC were shown the Violet Chambers Fund pack (information sheet and application form) in order to get their feedback. The CiCC said they were happy with the fund pack.

SO...

Information about the Violet Chambers Fund was distributed to foster carers, residential settings, fostering teams and SW teams. Posters were mailed out to schools, children's centres, Hamilton House and Danesgate. The Violet Chambers Fund is being advertised on the SMTIM website, Facebook and in the Rights and Advocacy newsletter.

WHAT'S MEANINGFUL AND MEMORABLE TO YOU?

Applications have included visits to London to see West End shows, meals with relatives, go-karting, paintballing and rally driving any many more...

SO...

So far we've had 28 applications, and we've approved 21 of these. Some applications haven't been approved because young people have asked for something the council should already be providing. The unsuccessful applications have been followed up by Nikki Wilson and Howard Lovelady, and the young people have been able to make a second application.

"The show was really good and it was in London which is the best theatre place ever. I really enjoyed it. I enjoyed the whole experience and I have never seen such a professional show. Can't wait to tell my friends and make them jealous."

"I really think you should carry on with this [Violet Chambers Fund] as it brings families together and poorer families will be able to have fun."

LEAVING CARE

Various aspects of leaving care have been discussed by the CiCC. These include: the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum, the Charter for Care Leavers, pathway support and changes in the structure Children's Services which have had an impact upon the process of leaving care.

NATIONAL CARE ADVISORY SERVICE (NCAS)

The National Care Advisory Service (NCAS) provide advice, information and aim to improve the policy and practice of a young person's transition from care to adulthood¹. NCAS developed the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum which brings together local authorities so that they can support each other in achieving the best outcomes for outcomes for young people making the transition from care to adulthood.

YOU SAID

The CiCC discussed appointing a representative to attend the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum. Luke was appointed as the representative, but could not attend the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum as it was scheduled to take place on a weekday. The majority of the CiCC are in full time education, which means they were also not able to attend the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum.

SO...

Nikki Wilson contacted NCAS to raise the issue that young people who are in full time education cannot attend forum meetings which are scheduled on a weekday, and in response NCAS are planning on holding future meetings in the school holidays.

LEAVING CARE CHARTER

The Leaving Care Charter, as explained by the Department for Education, is a set of principles and promises made to care leavers by the local authority. The Leaving Care Charter is designed to raise expectation, aspiration and understanding of what care leavers need and what the local authority should do to be good corporate parents.

In May, Amy Keogh attended the SMTIM panel to discuss the Leaving Care Charter and Pathway Support. The Pathway Team has had issues in communicating the existence of the Charter to young people, and so Amy Keogh aimed to make the CiCC aware of the Charter and its purpose. Currently, most young people are made aware of the Charter through one to ones with workers. The Pathway Team is looking to develop their communication with young people in care by exploring the use of social media, but hurdles such as confidentiality need to be explored first.

YOU SAID

The CiCC said that the Charter for Care Leavers was too wordy, not written in words they understand, confusing and not realistic in its statements and promises. They proposed some amendments to the Charter for Care Leavers.

The CiCC's proposed Charter for Care Leavers

The City of York Promises to:

- Respect and believe in you, support you in your beliefs and accept your culture
- Value your strengths and encourage your goals
- Take time to listen to you, respect your point of view and put your needs, thoughts and feelings at the heart of all decisions about you. If our opinion is different to yours we will fully explain why, and try to negotiate a compromise.
- Give you information you may need to support you into adulthood.
- Support you with the choices you make; we will support, not judge, if you change your mind.
- Give you advice, information, practical and financial help and to provide emotional support.
- Prepare you for your move to independent living, but only when you are ready. To do all we can to help you feel safe and happy to help you settle into independent life.
- Help you break down barriers you face when dealing with other agencies. We will work with other agencies such as housing, benefits, colleges, universities, employment providers, and health services to offer you the support you may need. To provide you with a Pathway Worker to age 21 or 25 if in education.
- Offer you advice and information whatever your age.

SO...

These suggestions were taken into account when the Charter was revised in 2013. This shows the CiCC had a direct involvement in improving the Charter.

The Pathway Team is in the process of setting up a Care Leavers Consultation Group - consisting of members of the Pathway Team - that will meet regularly. It is hoped that a member of the consultation group will regularly attend the SMTIM panel to share information between looked after children and young people, and care leavers. Two members of the consultation group plan to attend the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum to keep up to date with national developments for care leavers, and also to benchmark York's Pathway Service against that of other local authorities.