



# CHILDREN IN CARE COUNCIL

## Spring/Summer 2018

### IMPACT REPORT

## INTRODUCTION

### What is Children in Care Council?

The Children in Care Council is a forum where young people looked after by Croydon are able to shape and influence the parenting that they receive at every level. It aims to give young people a chance to have a say about the things that really matter in their lives and input to the setting of Local Authority strategies which affect those in or who have recently left care.

The forum is structured in a workshop format and aims to be led by young people looked after with the support of the youth engagement team. Sessions take place on a fortnightly basis during term time at Bernard Weatherill House and welcomes all young people looked after by Croydon and care leavers. The forum has a primary function of amplifying the voice of its members by identifying themes and issues relevant to being in or having left care. The views, ideas and feedback being shared with the Early Help and Social Care Directorate, Education and Youth Engagement Directorate, Youth Cabinet and Corporate Parenting Panel.

### Aims and Objectives

- From October 2017 to re-invigorate the CiCC for children and young people who are looked after by Croydon Council
- Give children and young people a chance to have a say about the things that really matter in their lives
- Give children and young people the chance to shape and influence the corporate parenting that they receive
- Help to shape the strategies for looked after children and young people in Croydon

### Benefits for Young People

- Improve the collective experience of looked after young people borough-wide
- Establish a community of looked after young people in Croydon
- Through team work gain leadership skills which are helpful for young people aspiring to higher education and employment
- Support other looked after young people new to being looked after
- Represent approximately 900 other looked after young people

### Key Statistics

- 15 members recruited between January and June 2018
- 3 members have Special Education Needs (SEN)
- 1 is a care leaver
- 1 is supported by Children Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)
- 8 come from Black Asian and Minority Ethnic Backgrounds (BAME)

# RECRUITMENT

Since launching in October 2017, the Youth Engagement team have proactively established new working relationships and continuous communication with core Early Help and Social Care teams, education providers, partner organisations and foster carers to support the publicising, recruitment and retention of members. The aim of creating a new group; these young people would then participate in sessions, consultations and fun activities.

Of the 15 members aged 11-21 that were recruited between January and July 2018:

- 4 were referred following visits to foster carer forums
- 3 existing Youth Engagement team project participants
- 3 referred from permanence teams
- 2 referred from a partner organisation
- 1 joined after seeing publicity at school
- 1 referred from the Virtual School
- 1 referred by a friend already a CiCC member



The total numbers recruited reflect well across Croydon's pan-London neighbours; Harrow, Greenwich and Bromley each having comparable numbers of participants. However, Croydon's population is much greater than these (and other boroughs) meaning that whilst a direct comparison is difficult to identify, higher participant numbers continue to be aimed for and ideally to split the CiCC into two age range groups that recognise the importance of socialising with age appropriate peers.

# SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIONS AND PROJECTS

The core objective for the Children in Care Council since relaunching in October 2017 has been for its members to have a say about the things that really matter in their lives, this is achieved by exploring topics and issues that are relevant to the lifecycle of a young people looked after by Croydon. In the period from February to July 2018 members participated in over 20 hours of learning, discussion and workshops covering topics such as the borough's relationship and commitment to young people, service improvement, life skills and placement solutions.

## 1. Reviewing the Corporate Parenting Panel's Pledge

In spring the CiCC embarked upon a review of the Corporate Parenting Panel Pledge. The Pledge exists as a set of twelve statements which outline the guiding principles for how the local authority should approach their responsibility to 'parent' looked after young people and care leavers and what they should therefore expect.

Over a period of four-sessions CiCC members carried out group activities to discuss, interpret and shape the pledge so it becomes more accessible, understandable, relatable and closer to what looked after young people's needs and wants are. Using facilitated activities, young people carried out a review of the existing commitments by exploring each statement and its meaning. They then discussed, as a group, how they felt about a commitment and whether it should be kept 'as is' or replaced with 'their' language.

Across all twelve commitments the CiCC members who engaged with this activity proposed that five of the commitments either did not reflect their expectations of the local authority in these areas or the language used was not accessible to the majority of young people and were amended. Of the seven remaining commitments, young people agreed that they were relevant and clear.



**Fig 1. Summary of feedback from CiCC members (Corporate Parenting Panel Pledge) spring 2018**

<b>Pledge commitment</b>	<b>Proposed change</b>	<b>Young peoples' comments</b>
"We will help you to access positive leisure activities"	"We will help you to access positive activities"	"The revised version is better for young people because its short and better to understand as young people don't like reading long sentences"
"We will support and help you in seeking education, employment and training when you are beyond school age"	"We will make sure your education continues into later life"	"It is important that support is put in place for a young person after they leave care so that they are not left alone"  "Although 18 it is the legal age where your allowed to be out of education, funding should still be provided to encourage students to take on further education, which is important"  "This simplified version means that everyone can understand"
"We will provide you with a place to live that is right for you"	"We will provide you with a place to live that is safe & happy for you"	"This version to providing young people with somewhere safe and happy"  "Safe and happy reinforces a child's needs"  "I strongly agree because I feel happy when I am with my family"  "It highlights that being safe and happy are important "
"We will provide you with services to meet your physical and emotional health needs and celebrate your identity"	"We will provide you with services to meet all your needs and celebrate who you are"	"This is the best and most important change"
"We will provide you with support in moving on from care and prepare you for independent living"	"We will support you in moving on from care and prepare you for living independently"	"Very reassuring"  "[the] wording has changed but it means the same thing"

**Next Steps:** The review of the pledge is an ongoing piece of consultation the CiCC members are engaged with and two further streams of activity exist in relation to this topic.

First: the final proposed changes are expected to be presented, by CiCC members, to the Corporate Parenting Panel in the autumn

Secondly: an internal communications and publicity campaign to ensure that the feedback provided by young people is followed up on, circulated where relevant and monitored by the panel and relevant local authority service areas.

## 2. Local Offer

The CiCC provided input to a consultation on the local authority statutory requirement in helping shape parts of the local offer. Via an interactive workshop, 10 members engaged in the topic of the care lifecycle and supported work to understand the key services, interventions and positive activities that could benefit young people. These views served to support and influence parts of the ongoing work to publish the local offer.

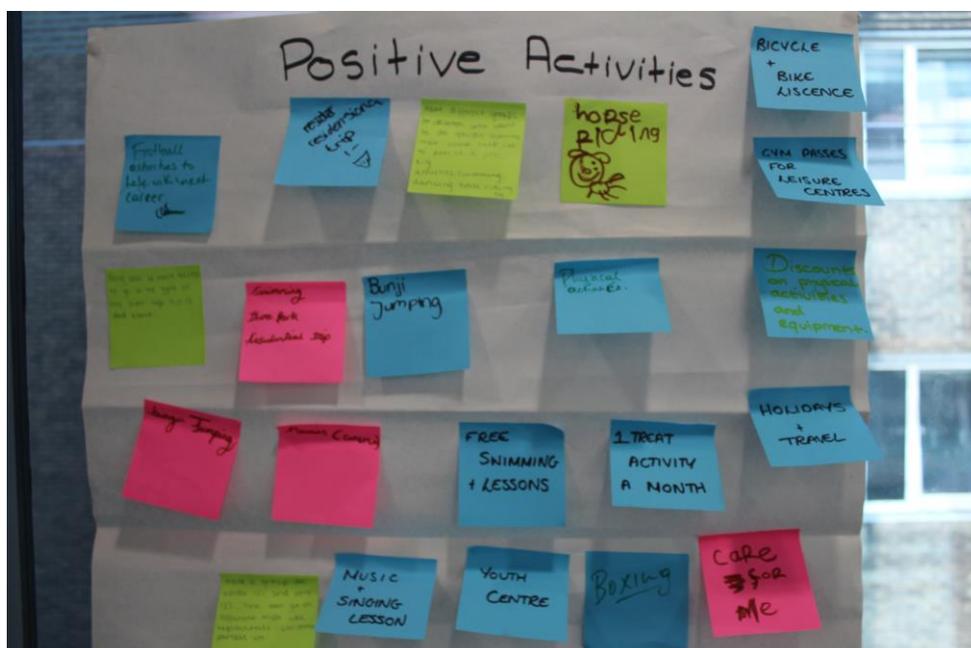
**Next Steps:** The CiCC now understands its role in supporting ongoing improvement work being carried out by the Early Help & Social Care division and regular consultation will support this.



## 3. Regional Engagement

In addition to local topics related to looked after young people; the CiCC members have also been involved with two regional activities which have given a wider reach to Croydon's looked after young people. In the spring and summer terms (including school holidays) two CiCC members, including one care leaver, represented Croydon's population at the London Children in Care Council meeting which is a Partnership for Young London initiative. The London Children in Care Council aims to strengthen the skills, campaigning ability of individual borough CiCC members in London as well as mobilising the voice of looked after young people in London. Via this engagement a programme of skills development (see incentives and rewards) has been created to mirror aspects of the London Children in Care Council skills development objectives.

The CiCC have also been working with the South London Commissioning Group, the project aimed to explore the viability of a new software solution which aids the process of placing young people with carers has received the support of two CiCC members. They will provide service user feedback to support the procurement process of this software.



# INCENTIVES AND REWARDS

Throughout the period, young people were offered incentives for regular attendance and positive engagement across the sessions. Such practice, commonplace by CiCC's in the London area that are newly formed or are seeking to become established has seen membership grow and maintain consistent attendance figures across the spring and summer terms.

Each experiences or trips were selected by group members who were consulted by Youth Engagement workers. The model for rewarding young people with these experiences was based upon regular attendance of at least 5 consecutive sessions – over the course of the programme this would amount to almost three months of consistent engagement.

Mirroring parts of the London Children in Care Council and following sector practices, members were offered a mini-programme of life-skills style sessions. These aimed to: help them in making better choices, benefitting from having a broader range of abilities and continue their social development by participating in a group setting.

## 1. Money Management

Identified as a need for young people approaching the transition to becoming a care leaver, the CiCC participated in an educational workshop Money Twist KS3 session in July aimed at supporting young people in learning about money, currency and financial independence.

Through an Interactive session young people built knowledge around basic finance and helping them engage with money on topics such as:

- History and functions of money, security features of notes, currency and exchange rates.
- Budgeting, youth employment, minimum wage, needs and wants, shopping deals, risk and saving.
- Interest, current and savings accounts, ethical banking, flow of money, consumer choice and future of money.



## 2. Sugar Workshop (pancake making)

In February, CiCC members took part in a sugar workshop at Good Food Matters in New Addington which was aimed at providing young people with the basis to understand sugar content in food groups, enabling them to make better lifestyle choices.

As part of this session, young people were provided with information, guidance and advice on how to live sustainably, plant food sources, manage sugar intake and as it was near Shrove Tuesday - make pancakes.



### 3. Song writing

As part of an exercise to learn about the aspirations of the CiCC members, the young people expressed an interest in music and using music as a creative method to express themselves about topics that are relevant to their day to day experiences. In response to this members participated in a music session with professional music producers (The Music Klub) to learn how to write lyrics, produce music and write the song ['Morley's Life.'](#)



Through participating in these activities, the young people demonstrated their learning to:

- Set goals
- Explore their individual aspirations, talent & creativity
- Understand their potential
- Use creativity to help make holistic life choices
- Increase knowledge & raise awareness of how music can help express views

### Rewards: Summer Trips Programme

In addition to skills development in areas related to independent living and creative expression, a small programme of trips and group experiences served to provide young people with space for the group to strengthen, grow and for friendships to emerge. Young people who are members of the CiCC were central to the decision making for these trips and experiences and in a group setting researched and selected each visit. Between March and July the CiCC took part in:

- Two restaurant visits
- Two cinema trips
- Ten-pin bowling and Arcade visit
- Day trip to Thorpe Park

**Next Steps:** A further purpose to this programme of trips is to provide space for the group to associate outside of the local authority setting and to become accustomed to being a member of a mixed age-range group.

A number of individuals within the group have complex behaviours and support needs, mainly disclosed to the Youth Engagement team by their carers and social workers. The individual needs of the membership has meant that additional time and support was (and continues) to be provided to them.

These circumstances have meant that a gradual approach has been taken to trips and experiences with an aspiration for 2019 to reinstate a group residential for CiCC members, which follows existing practice across the region and will further strengthen the voice of the group.

# FEEDBACK FROM CICC MEMBERS & CARERS

Regular and continuous feedback has been an important aspect of youth engagement team's approach to supporting the development of the CiCC membership group.

At termly intervals, and upon completion of the review of the pledge consultation young people provided survey responses and free-text comments to enable the youth engagement team to understand group dynamics, satisfaction and likelihood of retention and recommendation.



## QUOTES FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

*(sample of free text comments from project evaluation forms)*

“Through the **networking and games**, I got to meet people that I don't know”.

“Being able to be heard. I got to **speak my mind**”.

“It allowed me to interact with other people while **expressing my views**. It gave us a sense of community”.

“I got to know more about the **Pledge**”.

“Hearing other people's experience really got me **Inspired**”.

“I learnt about the different **Opportunities** open to me”.

“I learnt that I matter and that I can make **Change**”.

Young People's Project Evaluation Feedback	Carers Project Evaluation Feedback
<p>100% said they had <b>fun</b>                      100% said they had gained skills in <b>teamwork</b>                      100% said they had gained more <b>confidence</b>                      100% said they had gained <b>new creative skills</b>                      100% said they had made <b>new friends</b>                      100% said they felt more <b>connected to community</b>                      100% said they felt <b>proud of themselves</b> and others around them                      100% said they felt <b>supported, respected and inspired</b> by staff                      100% said felt that they <b>discussed big issues and learnt new things</b></p>	<p>100% said their young person had <b>fun</b>                      100% said their young person had gained skills in <b>teamwork</b>                      100% said their young person had gained more <b>confidence</b>                      100% said their young person had gained <b>new creative skills</b>                      100% said their young person had made <b>new friends</b>                      100% said their young person felt more <b>connected to community</b>                      100% said they felt their young person was <b>proud</b> of themselves                      100% said their young person felt <b>supported, respected and inspired</b> by staff                      100% said felt that they <b>debated big issues and learnt new things</b>.</p>

## CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

The running of the Children in Care Council from within the Education and Youth Engagement division has presented a number of key points to reflect and learn from heading into the second year of the project since its reinstatement in October 2017. A key success can be seen in the project retaining its membership numbers in a new and unfamiliar setting. A further success can be seen in the high levels of satisfaction, development and confidence both young people who are members and their carers who have in the project's ability to collect and share views for the benefit of those in or who have recently left care.

A development area for the project heading into the new school year is to empower the existing membership to select core themes related to being a young person looked after and use the session time to interrogate issues, share experiences and make proposals that influence decision making each term. Furthermore, a presence at the Corporate Parenting Panel which is expected to resume in the autumn will enable members to present their work, engage with those who make decisions and see their voices having an impact on local young people who are in a similar situation to them. In support of this, strengthening working partnerships between the young engagement team and key social care teams is crucial to the growth, output and sustainability of the project and ensure that a diversity of members' voices and views are positioned to be heard at various levels.

An exciting development for the months ahead is to empower members to take ownership of the CiCC as a 'brand' and continue work to develop the look, feel and naming of the project. Anecdotal feedback, and sector practice indicates that the terminology of the group i.e. 'children' and 'care' potentially reduce the likelihood of recruitment success and sustained engagement. To address this, the membership will continue an exploration into suitable titles for the group expanding on existing ideas with a view to launching a rebranded CiCC in early 2019.



A further project that CiCC members will be central to in the autumn is the reinstatement of the Croydon STAR Awards.

The awards give families, professionals, educators and members of the community the opportunity to celebrate the success, talents, achievement and recognition of young people who are looked after by the London Borough of Croydon. The awards give these young people a unique opportunity to be acknowledged in a very public way at a high profile event in the autumn.

Croydon hosts one of the largest populations of young people who are looked after in the UK, each and every day they are doing amazing things all over the borough. Be it academic success, sporting talent, personal achievement or that we recognise a hurdle they have overcome, they are all stars and these awards aim to reflect that.

## PROJECT TEAM

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