

4 January 2022		ITEM: 6
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Children In Care Council Update		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non Key	
Report of: Annie Guidotti , CICC Project Worker Open Door Christopher Bennett, Chair Children in Care Council		
Accountable Assistant Director: Janet Simon, Interim Assistant Director Children's Social Care and Early Help		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director Of Children's Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of the work of the Children In Care Council with some illustration of the issues consulted about over the past year.

The report outlines that the CiCC is made up of 12 young people most of whom are older young people/ care leavers. Meetings are held monthly and over the past 12 months a range of visitors have met with the CiCC including the Director of Children's Services, Assistant Director, Portfolio holder, Strategic Lead Looked After Children and Service Manager for Adoption and Fostering.

The CiCC have been consulted about the pledge to looked after children and the Services to care leavers

The CiCC work collaboratively with the Participation and Engagement Officer in Children's Social Care, planning events and recruitment campaigns to involve more children and young people in the CiCC. Currently there is a project to involve children and young people in an animation project to create a promotional short film.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 That the report of the Children In Care Council report be noted.

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 This report provides a summary of the work carried out by the Children in Care Council over the period of one year specifically from August 2020 until August 2021
- 2.2 Open Door, an independent Thurrock Charity, is commissioned by Thurrock Council to establish and facilitate the Children In Care Council (CICC) which meets at regular intervals, currently monthly, to inform the consultation process and enable this group to discuss, debate and have their views considered about various pertinent issues and Thurrock Council policies.

The CICC is open to Thurrock young people whether they are currently a Child Looked After or Care Experienced.

The CICC receives regular visits from Council Officers who may present plans, policies and questions they wish to be considered by the young people.

They have been asked to provide their collective views on a range of issues, and have this year reviewed the Thurrock Pledge and a document issued to all Care Leavers - The Big Wide World.

CICC have discussed issues around rent difficulties, housing problems, feelings of isolation and many other topics.

The process for consultation with the CiCC is a request made to the Project Worker to create a slot in the agenda for the visitor, with detail of the subject they wish to discuss and any ask specific questions. The subject of the discussion and the questions are put to the members prior to the visit to ensure the members are fully aware of what is being asked of them.

In addition to our members, CICC also has a regular attendee, Carly Banks-Thurrock Participation Officer. Her role is to ensure the young people are being listened to should they raise any issues that may be affecting young people in care generally and to bring information to the members about any events or changes that may be happening in the future. She also takes information about issues discussed back to senior management within Thurrock Council.

While the group meetings are scheduled to take place on a monthly basis it does have the capacity to include additional special meetings. For example: the CICC members invitation made to newly elected Thurrock Counsellors to meet and discuss specific roles of each elected Cllr and how it may impact on the life of a young person in care/care leaver. This will also enable the members to ask questions around any issues or thoughts they may have about the future.

2.3 Our meetings are run by the Chairperson - Christopher Bennett was elected by the CICC members. Christopher runs the agenda to ensure we keep to time, he takes minutes and works closely with the Open Door Project Worker to produce minutes and the Agenda for the next meeting. He attends all Corporate Parenting Committee Meetings and keeps the CICC members updated on their activity.

2.4 Membership numbers stand currently at around 12 and reflect mainly those who are approaching or are cared for by After Care Services.

We have made a great effort to encourage new members to join the CICC but this has proved to be very challenging, particularly over the past year. The CICC members are anxious to encourage new members to come forward and join them and have discussed at length:

- What does a member feel about being part of the CICC
- What do you feel you want to say to encourage new membership
- Have you noticed any changes in yourself as a result of being part of the CICC.

We are currently developing a recruitment strategy which includes a letter has been written by the members to be sent out to all young people in care.

Thurrock Council recognised the difficulties in recruiting to the group and agreed to fund the animation theatre company to do some workshops with members and young people interested in animation. This will result in a short film using voices and avatars of the young people which will undoubtedly encourage new membership.

Open Door is planning to hold an activity week for young people that will help promote the CICC and encourage opportunities later in the year.

2.5 With the many restrictions put in place because of the Covid 19 pandemic it became difficult to continue face to face meetings with venues closed to us. We introduced Zoom meetings and continued to meet monthly while increasing contact with members of the group to reduce isolation. Using video conferencing tools we were able to include more members who had only been able to attend if they were in the area. We included new Thurrock members who are currently living in Leicester and Chelmsford.

During the last year it has been evident that the members were struggling from time to time due to the Covid restrictions, learning from home and not being able to socialise with friends and they have advised at meetings that they have enjoyed getting together and also having a little time at the end to chat together.

Members felt it would be good to ensure they had contact between meetings and asked for a CICC WhatsApp group could be set up which has been a good source of contact.

- 2.6 CICC have a membership of 12 members and generally can have an average of around 8 members attending each meeting. They range from students at school, college, university and employed. One member recently wrote this about his experience of CICC.

“Being a member of CICC for the past 3 years has been one of my proudest achievements. It provided me a route and link to take my cause of advocating for Children in Care to a national level by becoming an Ambassador for A National Voice. That allows me to become a panellist to England’s independent children in care review. I also mentioned it in my University application as it demonstrates many valuable skills that they are looking for in a candidate. CICC is a great way to build your confidence and C.V.”

This particular member has been accepted into Oxford University for History and Economics LV11 and this was confirmed when he received his grades of triple A*

He has advised us that he intends to continue to attend CICC meetings.

The CICC have members who are currently at University, one studying Medicine and has recently brought us news of her travels and placement in Uganda. She is now home and planning the continuation of her studies to become a Doctor.

- 2.7 The Open Door Project Worker role includes attending monthly meetings Go East- Eastern Region Participation Leads where many topics of interest to CICC are discussed.

This information is taken back to our monthly CICC meetings for discussion with group members. This enables us to ensure that Thurrock CICC is also dealing with Regional issues. The Project Worker also attends local focus groups.

The Project Worker ensures during the CICC meetings that young people are being respectful of each other and they allow everyone to have their say. Recently a buddy system has been agreed for the group to ensure any new members voices are not overtaken by more confident speakers.

- 2.8 CICC members met with the Ofsted Inspectors in November 2019 and the Inspectors felt they were made very welcome. Overall, they were positive meeting the young people but felt they could become a little too focussed on their own personal experiences. This was heard and debated, and members talked about the resilience that they required sometimes to help them through

their care experience. Some had a very positive outcome and others not so positive but they agreed to keep this in mind for future discussions. From that we put in place the questionnaire that visitors to the group should complete before a meeting is agreed. This enables us to be advised in advance of the content of the questions that would arise and assists the young people to have time for thought and reflection before they welcome the visitor.

- 2.9 Members have welcomed many guests including the Assistant Director who asked what it was like to be in CICC and what they think was being done well and what could be improved.

The Chair highlighted the need for more members to come forward to help give a more balanced view.

A member of CICC advised that he felt a lack of support at his transition time from care to after care as he was still concentrating on his studies while making the move into semi independence.

When asked if members felt they were being listened to and felt they were making a difference they advised that yes in many ways they did.

After the meeting it was agreed future meetings will be extended to two hours per month with a time limit of 30 minutes for guests to attend.

We welcomed the Strategic Lead for CLA. During discussion members identified that they felt there was a gap in the provision of information provided to care leavers who wished to move on to University. A focus group was suggested, and 3 members offered to be part of that focus group as they had experience in this. We were advised that the After Care Team would be tasked with this and would make contact. Meetings were arranged by After Care and the Youth Hub to discuss all aspects of a young people's requirements on this route and the result is that a final meeting to decide how this information will be provided to all care experienced young people will take place.

In March 2021 CICC welcomed Corporate Director of Childrens Services and Cllr Halden, Cabinet Member for Childrens Services and Adult Social Care. Various topics were discussed including housing, the highs and the lows young people in the group had experienced. Virtual Schools were praised for their input especially through the last months of difficult times. Members felt teachers in general could be more positive with the aspirations of young people in care. Some members felt that positivity could come from many places including Social Workers, Personal Advisors. Our guests advised they would take this information back to Thurrock and said they had enjoyed meeting with the members. The members certainly enjoyed talking and being listened to by our guests.

The CICC was consulted on how members felt it would be best to attract new Foster Carers from the Service Manager Adoption & Fostering. He presented

possible plans for this and asked for comments. The group of members chose what they felt was the best logo and made suggestions as to where advisements could be placed in the Borough.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 The report is required to update Thurrock Council of the progress of the Children in Care Council and its findings and plans for the future to ensure the voice of the child is truly being heard.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The Local Authority have a duty to ensure that children in care are supported and their views and wishes are taken into account when planning services. The Commissioned Service provided by Open Door enables Looked After Children can be involved in the CiCC.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 The CiCC have been consulted in the completion of this report.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 The report is compatible with the Councils policies and priorities, and consultation with looked after children and care experienced young people will improve community relationships.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Jonathan Wilson**
Assistant Director of Finance

The service is commissioned by the Council and this covers the costs for venue hire, refreshments, travel, activities and staff time

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**
Interim Deputy Head of Legal (Social Care and Education)

There are no legal implications within the report.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Lee**
Team Manager, Community Development and Equalities

The CiCC is open to all looked after children and care experienced young people. The practice and principles of the CiCC are in keeping with the council's policies regarding equality, diversity and inclusion.

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, and Impact on Looked After Children

Looked After Children

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- None

9. **Appendices to the report**

- None

Report Author:

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Thurrock Open Door