

Participation Priorities for 2017-18

- Facilitate the Children in Care Council group on a weekly basis and capture the voice of children in care living outside of Cheshire East's footprint.
- Ensure the effective input of care leavers and cared for children and young people to the Corporate Parenting Committee through a "Shadow Board" and local initiatives and campaigns.
- Attend Corporate Parenting Operational Group (CPOG) meetings to represent the views of children and young people.
- Co-deliver the Star Awards with cared for children and young people and care leavers.
- Support children and young people to engage with national and regional UKYP elections and national sittings. Support of work and activities for MYP's and Cheshire East Youth Council.
- Support the 'Make Your Mark' elections.
- Develop children and young people's focussed campaigns, education and information on key UKYP topics.
- Engage and support young people at Youthforia meetings and residentials.
- Support Youth Council and Forum meetings.
- Attend and support children and young people to engage at the Children and Young People's Trust Board and relevant sub groups.
- Link to CAMHS young advisers.
- Co-ordinate and facilitate the Participation Network, ensuring effective partnership work.
- Ensure that participation activity is promoted and celebrated through developing a communication plan, linking with the corporate Communications Team.
- Promote awareness and celebration of children's rights through coordination of November Children's Right's Month.
- Widen, train and support the embedding of participation and delivery of the Children and Young People's Plan with all Cheshire East Children's Services including:

- how to involve young people in recruitment and selection of staff
- involving young people in business planning and evaluations for service improvement and development.
- providing training and support to teams in developing and embedding a participation plan and delivering children and young people's voice and participation specifically within their service areas.

Participation within Children and Young People

Children in Care Council (CICC) - 'My Voice'.

The Children in Care Councils (CICCs) plays a vital role in ensuring children and young people with care experience have a say in their care and the issues that matter to them. The CICC aims to bring together passionate and dedicated young people with those who run care services to share their experiences and ideas on how to improve the provision care in their area.

The group in Cheshire East is called 'My Voice' and meets each week during term time with the following aims:

- To provide a welcoming place for children and young people in care to meet up, which is safe and where they can support each other around their experiences of being in care.
- To run activities and have fun.
- To enable the children and young people to be able to raise issues and concerns about their experiences of care as well as come up with their ideas about how services could be improved.

The sessions are run in a way that engages, supports but also challenges children and young people to develop their skills, have fun but also

Care Leavers' Forum

This group aims to support care leavers as they establish themselves as independent young adults with responsibilities for their lives and with help around accommodation, financial management, health and wellbeing and skills / education.

The group in Cheshire East meets fortnightly and works with the facilitator to set out their own plan for the issues and activities they want to cover.

Examples of activities and input to decision making.

- Children's Trust Board input – Video Making
- Outcomes tool for pathways planning
- Review IRO Paperwork
- Councillors visit
- Case Studies work with The Children's Society
- Mental Health input with the MH nurse
- Star Awards planning
- Care Leavers Event – planning re. Care to be Different and Manchester festival
- Recruitment – planning for interviews and panel attendance

- Social Finance outcomes tool.
- Input (via TCS) to DWP consultation on Care Leaver's and issues on universal credit / benefits
- Input (via TCS) with Edward Timpson on improving support and highlighting key issues for care leavers

Recruitment and Selection

Children and young people in care and care leavers have also contributed to the recruitment of staff in Cheshire East, taking part in a number of recruitment exercises over the year for frontline staff and managers.

Permanance and Throughcare (PTC)

PTC staff visit children at home every 6 -8 weeks for a statutory visit. The purpose of this visit is to seek their current views around key areas in their lives such as health, emotions, education, accommodation, family etc. Regular visits and contact in between visits is essential to build a strong relationship with children.

At care plan meetings/ pathway plan reviews children are encouraged to give their views which feed directly into actions in their care plan. The child will be consulted prior to the meeting about who can attend and where and when it will take place to make sure they are comfortable with it.

An example of children making decisions is a young person working with Personal Assistant (PA) and Social Worker (SW) to decide upon their educational aspirations for the future. This could take place in the form of a Personal Education Plan (PEP) meeting where a young person would be invited to the meeting and able to contribute to decisions about their education. For example a young person may wish to become a teacher in the future. The social worker with support from a Virtual schools colleague would discuss with a young person the steps they would need to take to achieve this goal. The PEP meeting should take place termly so progress can be reviewed and additional support put in if required to ensure goals are being met.

Pathway plans appear to evidence the views and voice of the care leaver who is generally consulted about their plans and participate. All care leavers have an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) who independently review their pathway plan with them.

Audits capture the views of young people about their pathway plan. In very exceptional cases young people who are not engaging, are unlikely to have their current views in the plan. This related to a small percentage overall.

New in 2017, there is pre-arranged Children's Society 'drop in' at Cledford House, to speak to staff about cared for children's interest in the Children in Care Council.

The Team Manager has now attended the Care Leavers Forum twice in the past 6 months to obtain their views. There's greater scope for our PA champion to develop

these links between the service and the care leavers forum as we consider a review of our service plan and refocus on 2017/18.

Over 2017 we will also undertake a survey to obtain feedback from all care leavers we are working with

Readiness for Independence

Where possible social workers and PAs try to show children their views are being listened to and they have a direct input into decisions about their lives. An example of this is a number of care leavers aged 16/17 have said they now feel ready to live independently and they would like to move out of their foster placement or Children's residential home. Whilst this is unrealistic for some young people due to their level of need or personal circumstances it is possible for others.

Housing

As a service we listened to the views of young people and we have created a process giving young people (15½ plus) more choice and a voice about their next step options and have set up the Ignition Panel. The Ignition Panel, which is an innovative project that has been established to support young people to have the best, most appropriate transition for when they leave care, consists of a panel of accommodation providers. They read a case summary about a young person and discuss which provision may best meet their needs. Care Leavers have the opportunity to attend the Ignition Panel meeting with the support of their PA or Social Worker. The young person would be asked questions as to why they think they are ready for independence and what they have done to prepare themselves for independent living.

Last year 25 young people were referred to the Ignition Panel. Making sure our young people start independence at the right time and in the right place provides the best chance for a positive journey to adulthood and will support the best possible life chances. The panel shares ideas, suggestions, good practice etc. to develop an action plan that will support each young person to achieve their future living goals. This may be accessing a taster house, supported lodging or being supported through a semi-independent setting with a phased transition to young people being in their own property. Three young people who attended panel availed themselves of the taster flat over a 6 month period. Others obtained advice, more options to consider while others moved on to semi-independent provisions.

There are several trainer flats in Crewe designed to be used solely by 17 year olds who feel they are ready to live independently. The idea being by the time they turn 18 they could potentially have their own property via Homechoice or choose to privately rent.

Health

Having focused a great deal on those not in education, employment or training (NEET) last year, we have chosen to prioritise work around health for this year and

have some great initiatives planned with care leavers to include them in peer support and shared interests together as a group.

One such initiative that we have recently piloted and is now operational since April 2017 is the 'How am I doing?' tool to assess a young person's emotional well-being. This has been used to good effect from April 2017. A number of agencies have worked together on this from October 2016 to March 2017, alongside young people seeking their views who have helped us to shape this tool and make this more meaningful and relevant to them. As part of this work a PA dedicated to working with this group has currently 7 young people referred to her to engage in a positive activity of their choice to improve emotional well-being. Thus far, up to 30 young people have engaged in this task using the tool with social workers and/or their PA's. This tool results in a support plan being devised to promote better emotional well-being around the 5 key NHS outcomes e.g. be mindful, connect.

Every Monday evening the Care Leavers football group meet and there are an average of 7 young people each week and up to 20 young people in total who have participated. This started out in Crewe initially; then moved to facilities in Middlewich and now has a permanent fixture in Congleton. The group are now attending a 7 a side League and currently sourcing sponsorship for next year. They are participating in a Care Leaver Tournament on 29th June 2017. The PA's report the young people look forward to attending and enjoy the competitiveness. They say it keeps them fit and healthy, makes them feel happy and they feel they've achieved something, especially if they win. The only thing they don't like is getting beat!

Our PA Champion for Health is in the process of setting up a Positive Parenting Group for our pregnant and parent care leavers. Twelve parents have been invited to attend (13 children) and there are currently 3 heavily pregnant and 6 recent pregnant, also invited. A date has only just been confirmed so we are unsure of numbers attending at this stage but there is great interest in this. PA's are all willing to engage in the parenting group and appear to be quite excited about being a part of it.

One of our PA's is starting a fortnightly Health and Well-being drop in with Kirsty Savage the 16+ nurse. The pilot is due to start at the end of July in Macclesfield and letters will be going out to our care leavers in the next couple of weeks.

One of our PA's has had some interest in setting up a Clubercise group (fit dance in the dark with glow sticks) for our girls and is currently gathering interest to move this forward.

Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs)

In order to effectively engage children in making decisions IRO's must first be proactive in building a positive relationship with young people. It's not enough to simply attend a review every 6 months. An IRO should do a visit or call a child before the review to discuss the review process and any concerns they may have. A pre-review consultation form is sent out to each child and this feedback informs the review process.

IRO's must have an in depth knowledge of the child and any potential barriers to being able to effectively engage them such as learning difficulties or disabilities. The language used should be clear and information should be summarised in a way that is meaningful to the child.

An IRO is there to act as an advocate for the child and challenge any decisions if they think it's not in the Child's best interest. An IRO can help to engage a child in the decision making process by coming with an idea perhaps the SW or PA hasn't thought of. This could be a suggestion of a referral to another specialist service or some direct work.

IRO's have a flexible approach particularly when working with younger children and they will use direct work techniques such as asking children to draw images to represent their feelings. This approach may work better on a child who finds it difficult to verbally communicate their wishes and feelings.

One of our IROs is doing some participation work with care leavers focusing on how to improve the review process. He is currently working with young people helping them devise questions and take part in interviewing new IRO's. This extra participation work will hopefully improve the review process, thus enabling more young people to be actively involved in decision making processes.

Fostering

Fostering involve children in decision making processes by gaining they views during reviews and visits. Supervising social workers aim to include children in meetings to empower them to get their voices heard and influence decisions about their own lives.

Fostering has support workers who can meet with children on a more frequent basis to assist them by providing information, advice and guidance.

Star Awards

The Star Awards is an annual ceremony for our children in care and care leavers usually held in November during Children's Rights month. Last year it was run by the Children's Society so we are working with them and using their knowledge to assist in planning for this year's event with staff across children's service working with the Permanence and Through Care team meeting as a group tasked with planning and organising the Star Awards celebratory event in November 2017. To date have been 3 meetings – 9th, 26th May, 13th June. The next meeting is to be held on the 26th June. We have agreed the 19th November and the venue is booked for Wychwood Park. Planning is well underway and catering, nomination forms, publicity, discussions with the young people about theme are in the pipeline.