

**Wiltshire's Children in Care Council
Annual Report April 2015 – March 16**

**“It's about making a change and hearing from
the children and young people who are in
Wiltshire's care” (Children in Care Council
member, February 2016)**

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1. Introduction

The Government White Paper *Care Matters: A Time for Change* (2007) sets out that the role of the corporate parent is key to improving outcomes for looked after children and young people. The paper identified that it is important that children and young people have a chance to shape and influence the parenting they receive from the local authority.

In order to improve the role of the corporate parent the government expects every local authority to put in place arrangements for a 'Children in Care Council', with direct links to the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services. This gives looked after children and young people a forum to express their views, have their voice heard and influence the services and support they receive.

Within Wiltshire the Children in Care Council is coordinated by the Voice and Influence Team in Commissioning, Performance and School Effectiveness. The aim of the Voice and Influence Team is that no policy or service related to children and young people is developed without first seeking their views and that participation and involvement becomes 'the business' of every service and organisation that works with children and young people.

Historically Wiltshire Council has run two Children in Care Councils - one for older looked after children (aged 14 – 20) and one for younger looked after children (aged 7 – 14). However, a review of these forums in the summer of 2015 led to the decision to have one Children in Care Council (known as CiCC). CiCC currently meet once a month and the purpose of the group is to ensure looked after children and young people have a voice and influence over local decision making. Representatives from our children in care tell the local authority how they can improve the experiences of looked after children, young people and care leavers.

The CiCC terms of reference (appendix 1) were reviewed with the group in the autumn of 2015, and the group decided that they wanted to extend membership and run a recruitment drive, and ensure the group is more representative of the voice of Wiltshire Council's looked after children. With that in mind, CiCC agreed that they would like the group to cover the age range of 12-25. From 1 April 2016, when the revised terms of reference come into effect, the young people aged 12-18 will be known as Care Ambassadors, and those aged 19-25 will be Care Leaver Ambassadors. The recruitment poster designed with CiCC can be seen in appendix 2.

The work of the Children in Care Council in Wiltshire over the past year has influenced a range of decisions and working practice within the local authority. This report sets out what the Children in Care Council have been doing over the last year including their key messages and the impact their voice has had.

2. Management Information

As at 1 February 2016 there were 398 children and young people in the care of Wiltshire Council (11 less than when the 2014-2015 report was written). CiCC is made up of 6 active participants who have regularly engaged in forums during 2015/2016. The youngest member is 15 years old and the oldest is 21. The average age is 17.6yrs. There are three females and three males.

Five members of CiCC are White British, whilst one member is Black African and is an unaccompanied asylum seeker. Other ethnicities are not represented.

Outlined below is how the demographic of CiCC compares against the wider looked after population in Wiltshire:

Age of CiCC cohort compared to overall LAC population

Age	Wiltshire wide	CiCC
Primary age (0-11)	42.9%	0%
Secondary age (12-16)	36.0%	16.7%
Post 16	21.1%	83.3%

The group would like more children and young people under the age of 16 to get involved with the Children in Care Council.

The table below shows the type of provision that the members of CiCC are placed in:

Wiltshire Council Foster Carer	Residential provider	Leaving Care provision
1 (16.7%)	1 (16.7%)	4 (66.7%)

The group does not have representatives in the following types of placements:

- Kinship care
- Foster care through an independent fostering agency
- Host family

There is one member in the current cohort in CiCC who is placed out of county (leaving care provision); the remaining 5 are placed within the geographical boundaries of Wiltshire Council.

No members of CiCC have a disability.

During 2015/16 there have been 10 CiCC meetings. The group also looked to run an induction session for new members called, "An Introduction to the Children in Care Council" to try and recruit more members to the group.

3. Key achievements and changes to CiCC

In September 2015 the CiCC created an action plan which sets out what they want to focus on over the next year. This includes:

- Raising awareness of mental health issues and bullying
- Organising and leading on training for personal advisors and designated teachers
- Communicating better with looked after children across the county

The Children in Care Council have a number of achievements to report from their work during the last 12 months. These include but are not limited to:

- Taking part in the most recent Ofsted inspection (in which the Council received a rating of 'requires improvement to be good') by hosting an inspector at one of the CiCC meetings and sharing their thoughts and experiences of support from Children's Social Care and from health partners.
- Working with and influencing corporate parents and senior social care managers to raise the Leaving Care Grant to £2k.
- Created a new young person friendly version of the Care Leavers entitlement leaflet, to advise care leavers of their rights.
- Reviewed and commented on the Children and Young People's Mental Health Transformation plan, which was then fed back to the relevant Lead Commissioner, using young people's voices to help shape local priorities.
- Agreed with Corporate Parents the strategic priorities they should work towards over the next 12 months. This included ensuring there was a specific priority focusing on emotional wellbeing and mental health.
- Provided training to new staff at the induction for new staff within Children's Services, and also to foster carers and Personal Advisers.
- Sitting on numerous interview panels for children's services staff.

During the autumn of 2015, in consultation with CiCC it was decided to move the venue of the meetings to County Hall from Aspire House. The key reason for this was that Trowbridge was more accessible to young people across the county because of its good transport links. Meeting rooms are larger with greater access to technology, i.e. Smart boards. The group no longer required kitchen facilities to cook meals, and finally on a safety note, the Facilities Management Team are also at County Hall until 10pm; therefore if there were any emergencies within the group, there is support from the FM Team to manage this.

4. Finance

There are two main costs to running the Children in Care Council; these are the cost of providing refreshments for the group and the cost of transporting young people to the meetings.

The total cost of running CiCC per year is just over £1000 (based on an average meeting cost x 12). The average cost of a meeting is £88.59. With the exception of staff time, the bulk of this is spent on refreshments and transport.

Date	April 2015	May2015	June 2015	July 2015	Aug 2015	Sep 2015	Oct 2015	Nov 2015	Dec 2015 – Xmas party	Jan 2016	Feb 2016	March 2016
No of YP attending	No data	No data	No data	3	Cancelled	4	4	5	6	4	5	Cancelled
Average age	No data	No data	No data	16.6	Cancelled	16	17.75	17.6	17.6	17.5	17.8	Cancelled
Transport costs	No data	No data	No data	£18	Cancelled	£20	£34.60	£34.60	£94.20	£54.60	£54.60	Cancelled
Food costs	No data	No data	No data	£43.15	Cancelled	£38.86	£33.60	£30	£103.95	£30	£30	Cancelled
Total	n/a	n/a	n/a	£61.15	n/a	£58.86	£68.2	£64.60	£198.15	£84.60	£84.60	n/a
Cost per head	n/a	n/a	n/a	£20.38	n/a	£14.72	£17.05	£12.92	£33.03	£21.15	£16.92	n/a

The Voice and Influence Team have liaised with Elixir to come to a special agreement, whereby Elixir will supply the food for CiCC for £30 per session for up to 16 people. As the current numbers of CiCC are relatively low, this works out at £5 per head if all 6 members were to attend. A significant proportion of the overall budget is spent on transport (we know from our young people that it is quite a challenge for them getting to meetings as some of them have to travel a long way). Within the Voice and Influence team, we are helping to tackle this issue by encouraging young people to make use of public transport to get to CiCC meetings. However, we appreciate that our CiCC cohort are vulnerable young people and taxis are used on a regular basis as we cannot expect young people to walk over a mile home late in the evening once meetings have finished (particularly in the winter when it is cold and dark).

The Voice and Influence team is looking at more innovative ways to run meetings to avoid the need to travel, eg, using video or conference call technology. We are also working with parents/carers/providers to support young people's attendance at meetings by providing transport which helps young people feel safe.

5. Recruitment and future plans

It is clear that the current cohort attending CiCC is not representative of the wider group of looked after children and young people in Wiltshire. There has been an over-reliance on the 6 active members to attend regular corporate meetings which can, on occasion, result in these young people missing time from school, college and work. This needs to be addressed and we need to develop a model which does not take children and young people out of education or work.

The Voice and Influence Team is keen to ensure that participation is meaningful and that children and young people feel their voice is being heard and is making a difference. Although most young people are positive about their involvement some have raised questions about their participation.

- “I don’t understand why I’m at the meeting as I don’t get involved”
- “I’m not asked for my opinion”
- “I don’t understand what they’re talking about”

We are therefore working with young people to review our way of working so that the group is more representative and empowers young people more effectively in decision making. One thought is that if there were more members of CiCC that meetings could be covered on a rotational basis, and would allow the opportunity for deputies to cover meetings, and so there would not be a reliance on the same young people attending.

To enable us to look at this model, first and foremost CiCC needs more members. This is an issue that the young people feel strongly about and therefore it was agreed that we would run a recruitment campaign to attract new people to the group. A recruitment poster was designed (appendix 2) and sent out. Methods of reaching children/young people included:

- Word of mouth from current participants
- Copy of recruitment poster sent out with the quarterly Who Cares? Magazines
- Article in the newsletter for foster carers
- Poster sent out to the Children and Families Voluntary Sector Forum

- Posters issued to secondary schools via Wisenet, with a request for them to display the document
- Copy of the poster on a loop being displayed on the TV screen in the atrium
- All Independent Reviewing Officers asked to promote the service at meetings attended by children and young people to review their care plan
- Virtual School officers were asked to promote the service
- Social workers and Personal Advisers were asked to promote the service
- Recruitment information sent out in the regular children's services bulletins
- Notifications sent to all Independent Fostering Agencies, Residential providers and Leaving Care Providers

It is essential that new members are brought into the group as 4 of the 6 participants are over 18 and it's likely at some point they will look to move on from the group, which would be a natural progression which the Voice and Influence team would support.

As part of the recruitment plan, an induction evening was booked for Tuesday 8th March to welcome new members, tell them more about CiCC, introduce them to some of the corporate parents and carry out some team building exercises with the current cohort.

There were 7 young people who expressed an interest in being involved in the induction event through their social worker, PA or virtual school officer. When information was sent out confirming the event, only 1 young person confirmed that they still wished to attend. Therefore, after discussion with the Lead Member for Children's Services (Councillor Laura Mayes) a decision was taken to postpone this event, until more young people were engaged with the group.

Recruitment does remain the number one issue facing the group and needs to be a priority of all those involved in supporting CiCC. The Looked after Children and Care Leaver Improvement Group, are also focusing on CiCC within the improvement plan and there are some specific actions set.

Options for future development of CiCC include:

- Less frequent activity based meetings.
- Meetings taking place in local areas to reduce travel time.

- Inviting corporate parents to attend CiCC meetings, to ensure they are hearing the voice of children and young people.

The Voice and Influence Team is currently working on an options paper for the development of CiCC which will be presented to senior managers and corporate parents at the end of June 2016.

The paper will be written following research and engagement with other local authorities (this activity is already taking place), interaction with foster carers and most importantly feedback and engagement from young people, which will culminate with an activity day for young people (with CiCC workshops) on Wednesday 1st June.

6. Recommendations and key points

- CiCC needs to be more representative of the LAC population. This needs to be achieved by recruiting more members. To recruit we need to:
 - Create greater awareness of CiCC within our LAC population
 - Market and promote CiCC effectively
 - Make the session more accessible
 - Make the sessions more engaging
- Issues around transport should be looked into for each individual member to see if transport costs can be reduced – this may involve working closely with the category managers for children within the strategic procurement hub, to challenge providers to ensure they are fulfilling their contractual obligations

Wiltshire Council is meeting its statutory obligations under *Care Matters: a Time for Change* (2007) as there is a fully established Children in Care Council that meets regularly and influences decision making.

Wiltshire Council tracks the key messages from children and young people throughout the year including whether actions have been followed up using a 'You said...We did' document. This document focuses on things that children and young people feel could be improved and what is being done in response. The views and key messages from looked after children, young people and care leavers are reflected throughout the document.

The work of the Children in Care Council is embedded within the work of the Looked after Children, young People and Care Leaver's Improvement Group and Corporate Parenting Panel, although there is still some work to be done to strengthen this relationship and ensure that young people's voice is clearly leading to better outcomes for children and young people, and that members of the Children in Care Council are holding the Council to account as their corporate parent.

7. Appendices

Children in Care Council **Terms of reference (What it's all about)**

Who we are

The Children in Care Council are children and young people age 12-19 (Care Ambassadors) and 19-25 (Care Leaver Ambassadors). We meet to tell decision makers what the issues are for children in care and care leavers. We meet with Senior Managers and Elected Members who are responsible for making important decisions about the lives of children in care in Wiltshire.

Why we do it

We want to make sure that children and young people's voices are heard and actions re taken about the decisions that affect their lives.

"It's about making a change and hearing from the children and young people who are in Wiltshire's care" (Children in Care Council member, February 2016)

What do we do?

- Tell people who make decisions about services for children in care what we think can be done to make things better
- Speak for all children and young people in care by gathering their views and deciding how best to share these views with senior managers and corporate parents
- Receive feedback from senior managers and corporate parents on issues identified by children in care
- Tell children in care what has happened as a result of them sharing their views and ideas
- Involve children in care to check and monitor all services for children in care – for example, we comment on leaflets, documents, policies and strategies, and help to design child and young person friendly versions of documents
- Work on projects to help us get our voices heard – for example, we plan and run training for professionals
- Keep children in care updated on anything we have found out through meetings we attend, or topics presented by guests and visitors

How do we do it?

Care Ambassadors meet on a monthly basis (with Care Leaver Ambassadors joining meetings bi-monthly) to tell decision-makers what the issues are for children in care. These issues are discussed and taken to the Corporate Parenting Panel and the Looked after children, young people and care leavers Improvement Group. Senior Managers and Elected Members tell us what they are going to do about the problems and outline their plans to solve any issues.

The Children in Care Council is supported by 2 members of Wiltshire Council staff.

The agenda for CiCC meetings is sent to members via email and the CiCC Facebook page one week before the meeting.

We only allow one visitor per meeting to present a topic.

What is expected of us as CiCC Members?

CiCC members are acting as representatives for looked after children and young people. This is a big responsibility and so CiCC members are expected to behave professionally. This is what is expected:

- Members will be respectful of each other and visitors
- Members will not judge each other
- Member will not talk over each other
- All members should take an active part in meetings
- Conversations topics should remain relevant
- If members miss three consecutive meetings without a valid reason, they will be asked to step down from CiCC
- Mobile phones are only to be used during the breaks
- Members are to agree on who covers what meetings in a fair way
- Members will listen to and carry out actions requested by lead workers without question, in relation to personal safety, e.g. should there be a fire or medical emergency
- We will have one ten minute break in the meeting, we will stick to this time to ensure the meeting does not overrun

Wiltshire's Children in Care Council wants you!



Are you aged 12 - 25, in care or a care leaver and want to have a say about Children Services?

Do you want to meet other young people in care or who have left care, make new friends and have fun?

Are you: Determined? Self-motivated? Reliable? Good at listening? Interested in making changes for children and young people in care and care leavers?

If so, have you thought about becoming an Ambassador for the Children in Care Council (CiCC)?

Monthly evening meetings
Held at County Hall, Trowbridge