

Voice and Participation Update

November 24

Executive Overview

Dear Members of the Children's Select Committee,

I am pleased to share an update on the incredible work undertaken by Wiltshire's Voice and Participation Service, which continues to amplify the voices of children, young people, and families. Our efforts span multiple projects and initiatives, promoting empowerment, inclusion, and positive change.

This quarter, we have celebrated significant successes:

- **Children in Care Council (CiCC):** From confidence-building activities like mountaineering and bushcraft to the co-creation of a magazine, *Your Voice Matters*, we are enabling children in care to feel heard, valued, and included.
- **Young Carers Voice:** The new Young Carers Voice Service empowers young carers through councils, surveys, and co-produced projects. Their insights shape support initiatives such as the Young Carer ID Card and the Young Carers in Schools Award.
- **Tailored Support for Parents with Learning Disabilities:** In response to research findings, member of the Family Advisory Board has coproduced a Learning Disability (LD) Assessment and Plan. These tools promote early identification of learning needs and provide tailored support for parents during care proceedings. Feedback from parents and the Family Advisory Board highlights the positive impact of these initiatives, fostering better understanding, communication, and outcomes for families.
- **Independent Advocacy:** We received over 50 children's referrals for advocacy support in just one month, empowering them to participate meaningfully in care proceedings and reviews.

The outcomes from these initiatives have been transformative, helping young people develop confidence, build positive relationships, and inform key service developments.

However, challenges remain. There is still work to do to ensure:

1. **Sustained Engagement:** Recruitment for volunteers remains difficult, which impacts our ability to provide consistent support to all who need it.
2. **Consistency in Leadership:** The long-term absence of two out of three managers within the Voice and Participation Service has placed increased strain on staff and slowed the progression of key initiatives, particularly in areas like SEND and advocacy development.

3. **Service Integration:** Strengthening collaboration across teams and with external partners is essential to achieving our ambitious goals.

We are committed to addressing these gaps through focused actions and collaborative efforts. As we move forward, your continued support and strategic guidance will be invaluable in overcoming challenges and driving systemic improvements.

Thank you for championing the voices of Wiltshire's children and young people. Together, we can create a brighter future for all.

Yours sincerely,
Joe Sutton
Participation Manager

1. Voice Updates

Children's Social Care - Children and Young People

Children in Care Council (CiCC)

In the recent quarter, the team has continued to build its engagement through Children in Care Council activities.

Participants have had the opportunity to engage with a number of activities to increase their confidence and give them the platform to share their valuable experiences:

Activity Days:

- In August we completed a Joint voice mountaineering trip whereby 6 young people from across our Children in Care, Young Carers and Youth Council group were offered the 'experience of a lifetime' to climb the peaks of Pen Y Fan. 2 Virtual School Officers also attended.

"I absolutely loved the trip to Pen Y Fan, it was lovely to meet the young carers group and Wiltshire Youth Councillors, I am keeping in touch with them and would love the opportunity to do some joint voice activities again, we had so much in common and it was nice to feel that we could build positive friendships and learn about the different work everyone is doing."
Child in Care, aged 15.

- In September 3 CiCC members were supported to attend a trip to Thorpe Park.
- In November 17 children in care attended an adventure day at Oxenwood Outdoor Education Centre, participating in fun activities such as archery and Bushcraft.

CiCC Committee: The team consistently organises monthly sessions providing young people with valuable opportunities to engage with key professionals. These sessions serve as a platform for mutual feedback, fostering a two-way exchange of insights. Professionals benefit by refining their practices based on the feedback received from young individuals, while the latter gain insights into the supportive services offered by these professionals.

Corporate Parenting Panel Priorities- Our CiCC Committee's focus this quarter has been on the Corporate Parenting Panel Priority 4 'To have positive relationships with people who are important to me and for me to be part of my local community where I am trusted, respected, accepted and feel included.'

Our CiCC Committee members have met with SASS Service Manager and priority lead Michael Graham to discuss their key thoughts around what this priority means to them, what 'good looks like', and have raised some of the potential barriers that children in care and care-experienced young people may face. Common themes were identified and were discussed further at a Dragons Den event on 30th October, whereby 10 care-experienced young people heard more about the priority from Michael Graham, the lead



Councillor (Laura Mayes) and also in attendance was Katrina Mcjannet (Head of Children in Care & Young People). Findings will be shared at Corporate Parenting Panel in the January meeting.

The team has also coproduced a new magazine for children in care called 'Your Voice Matters'. The aim of this magazine is to help children understand how they can share their views, understand their rights and have all of the information needed to them in one place rather than many different leaflets.

LINK TO MAGAZINE

https://www.canva.com/design/DAGQEnKz14/L6Q7XGOqJWfalJL5p5Z-Yg/edit?utm_content=DAGQEnKz14&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link2&utm_source=sharebutton

Voice Ambassadors:

Our care-experienced Ambassadors continue to support the co-production of services across Wiltshire. They continue to support to support by delivering training, inspecting services, interviewing, and engaging in voice consultations. Here are some of the initiatives they have supported over quarter 2.

- **Consultation with Become Charity-** in August, our care-experienced Ambassadors shared their feedback on strengthening the care system by providing insights into the biggest issues facing CIC, identifying key areas of support, and suggesting how the national approach can improve the experiences of young people living in the care system.
- **Young Persons Fostering Consultation Panel-** Delivered a Young Persons Fostering Panel in August, whereby young people continue to meet with applicants and engage in a two-way discussion which promotes both applicants learning, and the opportunity for panellists to have a say in who are appointed as Wiltshire foster carers.
- **Co-producing the residential offer-** Ambassadors continue to co-produce the offer delivered by our new residential home providers. They have contributed their ideas to the furnishing of the houses, and delivered training to providers, including a session with the staff of Pheonix House, Melksham in August.
- **Interviewing-** 2 ambassadors were panellists for the on the Interim Director of Families and Children's Services interviews.
- **Corporate Parenting Panel-** Ambassadors continue to present their work and provide meaningful contributions at Corporate Parenting Panel meetings.

Outcomes from our Care-Experienced initiatives:

- Young people have had the opportunity to maintain and develop positive relationships with other children in care.
- Young people have had the opportunity to take part in unique confidence building opportunities that provide an 'experience of a lifetime'.
- Young people have been given the opportunity to scrutinise the services that are offered to them, and provide both positive and constructive feedback for future developments.

- All the feedback will be presented into a 'you said, we did together' format to ensure that young people and decision makers are clear on the developments following on from feedback and action agreed.
- Our Voice Ambassadors continue to gain valuable workplace experience whilst contributing invaluable insights for our initiatives.

Future Activities:

- CiCC Christmas Laser quest Party in December
- Ongoing Monthly Committee sessions that will consult the voices of young people and drive forward the key priorities.
- Contribute to the Supported accommodation moderation in January.

Other Consultation Work:

Training: over quarter 2 we have continued to deliver training to professionals which is led by our care-experienced staff.

- **Family Time Training-** 2 Family time training sessions delivered to foster carers. These training sessions equip foster carers with the knowledge and skills to support family time, and to help maintain positive relationships between young people and their birth families.
- **Ways Of Writing Training-** In October we delivered a Multiagency ways of writing session which will equip attendees across the Safeguarding Vulnerable Peoples Partnership with the skills to develop trauma aware case recordings.
- **Beyond Language that Cares Symposium-** Wiltshire's Voice and Participation Service attended the Beyond Language that Cares Symposium, this was a national consultation hosted by The Adolescent and Children's Trust (TACT), alongside other Local Authorities and Charities to take a joint approach to feedback and develop ideas on how we work in a trauma aware way across safeguarding and children in care services. A toolkit will be created in the following months which can be utilised by local authorities.

Other notable updates:

- **Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Group-** Cameron Draisey is now a member and representing the Voice and Participation Service and the Care-Experienced community within the EDI workgroup.

Key Outcomes:

- Training delivered by 'experts by experience' ensures that staff access a meaningful learning experience that informs their practice utilising service user feedback.
- Care-experienced employees are getting meaningful representation at our EDI group, which ensures that the recruitment process and policies made at Wiltshire Council are inclusive for this group.

Mind of My Own

Mind of My Own is an app that enables young people to share their thoughts and feelings directly with their workers. Since August 1st 2024 - 42 Young Person Accounts have been created.

Numbers of statements sent to workers.

Number of One Statements sent	150
Number of Express Statements sent	31
Total statements sent to Wiltshire Children's Services (One and Express)	118

One App Usage

Statement Type	Sent by Young People	Sent by Practitioners	Total
Totals	63	87	150
Conference	1	3	4
Foster Care Review	9	8	17
My Life	12	28	40
My Wellbeing	8	2	10
Pathway	1	0	1
Preparation	10	5	15
Problem	7	1	8
Share Good News	1	0	1
This Is Me	6	8	14
Worker Visit	8	32	40

Positive examples of the impact of using Mind Of My Own:

"I used mind of my own with two boys who had recently become looked after. They moved to a foster placement with their grandparents, a three hour drive away, leaving in July not knowing which school they would go to in September. Prior to this, they were clear they wanted to stay in Wiltshire. I completed a Mind of My Own with them two weeks after they moved. It was great to see the 8 year old boy talk about how happy he was, the other stating there was nothing he would change about home. This was great news for the boys and also very reassuring for me as their social worker. We always do what we think is in children's best interests however- Mind of My Own showed me that all the work was worth it."

Abbi, Kinship and Fostering Team

"I went to see the Young Person last Friday to gather his wishes and feelings. Then, over the weekend, he used Mind Of My Own to submit further information to his Social Worker, focusing on his mental well-being. I just wanted to let you know that the combination of the two had a really powerful impact at the conference. Everyone opted for a Child Protection (CP) Plan, with scaling scores of 8 and 9. Several participants commented that these decisions were due to hearing the YP's voice loud and clear through the two forms of advocacy. It was heartening to see both approaches working in tandem for the good of the child."

Conclusion

The Voice and Participation Service continues to promote the voices of children and young people through diverse and wide-ranging initiatives highlighted in this report. The service continues to empower Children in Care through transformative adventures to fostering youth-led advocacy with the Mind of My Own app. The engagement of Youth Voice Ambassadors, the establishment of a robust in-house Advocacy Service, and the strategic focus on young carers continues to support all our young people empowering them and valuing their experiences.

Young Carers Voice

Learning from the successful work we have done with the Children in Care Council; we have involved young carers from the very first point in setting up the new dedicated young carers voice service. We held a young carers council session around developing the questions for 2 new staff members the Young Carers Voice Worker and Young Carers in Schools Worker. We then had young carer representative on the interview panels for these positions and their insights were particularly helpful in choosing the right candidates. We were successful in recruiting Amy Tanker to the Young Carers Voice Worker position, and she started with The Voice and Participation Service in October. We have also recruited Lorraine Pullin to the Young Carers Schools Worker position, and she will be joining us in January.

Young Carers Council

In September the Young Carers council had a joint session with Community First and Forward Carers to look at a new young carers card that is being developed they gave their views on what the card can be used for (see below session feedback)



Young Carer Engagement Sessions- Feedback Report.pdf

The Young Carers Council last met on 29th October 2024. We had 9 Young Carers attending in-person. The focus of this meeting was identifying what type of project Young Carers would like to focus on. Training days for staff and professionals received the highest number of votes for how to raise awareness. Teachers, support services and police came joint top for who to raise awareness to. A training presentation will be co-produced and delivered by Young Carers to ensure Young Carer Voice is championed when training professionals.

The next Young Carers Council meeting (19th November) will be a follow up meeting on what Young Carers would find helpful as part of their Young Carer ID Card. Discussions will involve, why this will help young carers, and which idea is the most beneficial for young carers. A proposal to the Carer Commissioner will follow, detailing the actions and takeaways from the Young Carers Council Meeting.

Young Carers Magazine

Young Carers have told us that they do not like multiple leaflets and would rather have information in one place. Given this, work to create the Young Carers Magazine similar to the Your Voice Matters Magazine is underway, partners working directly with young carers

have been contacted and asked to write half a page on who they are, what they do to help young carers and how to get involved.

Young Carers Annual Survey

The Young Carers Survey aims to gather feedback from Young Carers aged 8-15 and Young Adult Carers age 16-24. The questionnaire will involve questions about their emotional wellbeing, support network, support in school and experiences as a young carer. These questions will be analysed alongside national benchmarks for Young Carers and young people who are not young carers. Current work supports the target for the survey to be distributed to Young Carers in January 2025.

Young Carers in Schools Award (YCiS Award)

The Young Carers Council have had an introduction to what the award is and how schools can achieve it. Ideas on what schools need to improve on were discussed in the most recent Young Carers Council Meeting. Themes such as being less strict on being late and having correct uniform and more emphasis on identifying and supporting Young Carers were raised. The training tool that will be co-produced by the Young Carers Council will contribute to the implementation of the YCiS Award. In addition, the Young Carers Schools Worker will be in position from January 2025 to continue and grow the support available for Young Carers in schools.

SEND Voice Update

Overview of SEND Initiatives

Wiltshire Council and the Voice and Participation Service are implementing a range of initiatives to enhance services and support for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). The approach prioritises the voices and participation of SEND individuals and their families, ensuring that their experiences and aspirations are central to planning and decision-making. Key the below key initiatives include the SEND CYP Participation Development Plan, SHARE Consultation, SEND Youth Forum, the "Meeting Needs Together - Ambitious for All" strategy, and expanded support for SEND parents. Progression of some of the initiatives have been slower than expected due to the Ofsted inspection and long term sickness within the team.

Empowering SEND Children and Young People

We are committed to empowering children and young people with SEND by actively involving them in shaping service improvements. Through focus groups, collaborative committees, and events, young people are encouraged to share their experiences. The development of accessible resources, such as the "How to Plan for My Future" crib sheet and e-learning tools, aims to provide young people with the skills to advocate for themselves and navigate their future confidently. Additional initiatives, like the Transitions Advisory Board, support young people post-16, with a focus on preparing them for adulthood through opportunities in employment, independent living, and community inclusion.

A coproduction session held on 4th October 2024 at Fairfield College focused on engaging students with learning disabilities to understand their views and preferences regarding Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs) and annual reviews. Co-delivered by Wiltshire Council and Wiltshire CIL, the session aimed to ensure that young people could confidently share their thoughts in an interactive and accessible format. Key themes identified by the students included the importance of independence, safety, communication preferences, and the inclusion of key personal details in their EHCPs. The students also highlighted their desire for a more personalised and visually engaging format, with clear symbols and easy-to-read sections. The session provided valuable insights into how young people want to engage with their plans, such as through short, focused discussions and with trusted individuals who can support them. Several recommendations were made, including rethinking the terminology around EHCPs, using more relatable language such as “my life plan,” and considering individual preferences when presenting their plans. Follow-up consultations are planned to explore specific areas, such as transport and further contributions to the EHCP, ensuring that young people’s voices continue to shape the process.



Consulting on Key SEND Themes

The SHARE consultation engages children and young people with SEND on quarterly themes, capturing a broad perspective on their needs. These insights shape ongoing improvements in services and ensure that Wiltshire’s actions are guided by the voices of those directly impacted. By involving young people in decision-making processes related to Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs) and Annual Reviews, Wiltshire aims to significantly increase youth participation in these areas. Collaboration across multiple agencies ensures a united effort to amplify youth voices and drive positive change.

Amplifying Voices through the SEND Youth Forum

The SEND Youth Forum is being developed as a platform for young people with SEND to share their lived experiences. This forum aims to bridge the gap between young people and decision-makers, enabling SEND youth to contribute directly to service improvements.

Commitment to Inclusive and Coordinated Planning

Wiltshire’s “Meeting Needs Together - Ambitious for All” strategy focuses on empowering individuals with SEND and their families through six core priorities:

1. **Child- and Family-Centered Planning:** Ensuring that SEND children and their families are at the heart of planning and decision-making.
2. **Early Identification and Support:** Providing timely and tailored support to meet each child’s individual needs.
3. **Flexible Planning with Clear Outcomes:** Developing adaptable, outcome-driven plans.

4. **Accessible Communication:** Offering clear, family-friendly information to improve the overall experience.
5. **Skilled, Collaborative Professionals:** Training staff with the knowledge to provide effective support and work seamlessly across services.
6. **Supporting Transitions to Adulthood:** Focusing on independence, community inclusion, and timely, supported transitions for young people entering adulthood.

Strengthening Support for SEND Parents

Recognising the specific needs of parents with SEND, Wiltshire has enhanced collaboration with Social Care to provide targeted support. This includes a new SEND screening tool to identify and address parental support needs, ensuring a more responsive and comprehensive system. Co-created materials developed with the FAB parenting group aim to provide helpful guidance, while training and tools are available to help parents navigate SEND services effectively.

New Tools for Gathering Feedback

Wiltshire is introducing a new in-house tool to collect feedback from stakeholders, ensuring insights are actively integrated into future planning. Designed with accessibility and inclusivity in mind, this tool will facilitate comprehensive, meaningful data collection.

Promoting Inclusivity through "We Are One Society"

The "We Are One Society" initiative seeks to foster inclusivity and empathy by inviting individuals with lived experiences of disability to share their stories with schools. Through interactive sessions, the programme raises awareness of disabilities, promotes understanding, and encourages a supportive, inclusive culture within school environments. Outcomes are monitored through metrics such as student engagement, feedback scores, and shifts in attitudes towards inclusivity.

Summary

Wiltshire Council's initiatives demonstrate a strong commitment to improving the lives of children, young people, and families with SEND. By prioritising empowerment, inclusion, and responsive services, these initiatives aim to create an environment where every individual has the support needed to achieve their full potential.

Wiltshire Special School Healthy School Audit

As the school has not yet been officially accredited with its award, we will not mention which school the visit pertains to.

The Senior Leadership Team, staff and pupils have a whole-school approach regarding accessing and delivering support. Prior to our visit, the school developed a questionnaire entailing Healthy Schools questions which were distributed to several classes, this totalled to around 30 responses. The feedback provided by students was majority positive with most students selecting 'yes' to 'is there always a teacher you can speak to/get support from' and were able to name the teacher that the question referred to. This demonstrates that the school is meeting standards in the emotional and wellbeing section.

School notice boards displayed clear policies on anti-bullying and young carers. There was also a board dedicated to youth voice, which also outlined when the next meeting takes

place and current discussion topics. School notice boards emphasised their commitment to a whole school approach as they were clear, accessible and updated.

Student surveys and student's that volunteered to speak with us spoke highly about the food choices at school. During break time, almost all young people were utilising the outdoor space, socialising with their peers or supporting break time staff. It was also positive that food and drinks are also provided at break and lunch for staff if they wish. The school provides a welcoming dining environment for both young people and staff.

During the visit the school's approach PSHE education was both inclusive and educational for their students. Activities such as 'welly wanging' were explained which involved a fun physical activity combined with the mathematics of measuring distances and science of gravity.

In summary, the team left the school with a positive view of their quality of support, knowledge of inclusivity and associated actions and it is evident that they have a true commitment to their young people.

Family Voice Update

Parents with Learning Difficulties in Care Proceedings

Wiltshire Council recently participated in research led by the Institute of Public Care at Oxford Brookes University. The study explored the prevalence and experiences of parents with learning disabilities or difficulties involved in care proceedings concerning their babies in England. Findings indicated that a significant proportion of parents involved in care proceedings had learning disabilities or difficulties, with Wiltshire reporting a higher rate than the average across the four local authorities studied.

The study involved an analysis of court bundles and social work records of care proceedings for babies under one year old across four local authorities, including Wiltshire. Additionally, researchers conducted interviews with parents with learning disabilities or difficulties, as well as with social care and legal professionals.

Key Findings Specific to Wiltshire

In Wiltshire, 44% of care proceedings cases involved at least one parent with a learning disability or difficulty, compared to an average of 33% across the other authorities. The study highlighted a pattern of late identification of these needs, with 64% of Wiltshire cases only recognising parental learning disabilities or difficulties during the care proceedings. This late identification led to several challenges:

- Social worker communications, interventions, and assessments were not typically tailored to meet the parents' specific needs.
- Resources were often wasted due to repeated work necessitated by the late identification.
- In 40% of Wiltshire cases, no evidence was found of interventions being adjusted to support the parents' needs, particularly regarding pre-birth preparations.

Despite these challenges, Wiltshire demonstrated a higher quality of social worker interactions compared to other areas. Practitioners were noted for using clear, open, sensitive, and straightforward language. However, there were still instances where practitioners did not adequately address parents' lack of understanding. The research also

found that access to advocacy was particularly difficult in Wiltshire, compounding challenges for parents with learning disabilities or difficulties.

Response: Learning Disability Assessment and Plan

In response to the findings, Wiltshire Council has developed a Learning Disability (LD) Assessment and LD Plan, aimed at improving early identification and providing tailored support to parents with learning disabilities or difficulties. The Family Advisory Board played a crucial role in reviewing the new documents and providing feedback for changes. Our Parent Voice Ambassador also reached out to others with a LD who have been supported by Social Workers to gather their thoughts around the documents.

“It seems like it can be a massive contribution for families and it gives a better understanding of what need there is and what type of support can be given. It's a fantastic tool” (FAB member with LD)

LD Assessment

The LD Assessment tool is a screening mechanism designed to identify potential learning disabilities or difficulties in parents involved in care proceedings. This assessment:

- Includes questions about whether the parent has previously been assessed for learning disabilities or difficulties.
- Prompts practitioners to check records within Adult Social Care and to consider any history of support or Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).
- Helps practitioners gather comprehensive information about the parents' needs and create a responsive plan.

LD Plan

The LD Plan builds upon the LD Assessment by outlining specific actions to support identified learning disabilities or difficulties in parents. It uses insights from the LD Assessment to develop an individualised support plan, which may include:

- Addressing specific learning needs, such as reading difficulties.
- Providing support strategies tailored to each parent's assessed requirements.

Aims of the LD Assessment and LD Plan

By implementing the LD Assessment and LD Plan, Wiltshire Council seeks to improve outcomes for parents with learning disabilities or difficulties in care proceedings by:

- Promoting early identification of learning needs through systematic screening.
- Supporting the creation of individualised support plans.
- Enhancing communication between social workers and parents.
- Ensuring interventions and assessments are tailored to address each parent's specific learning requirements.

These tools represent a proactive step towards addressing the challenges highlighted by the research, promoting a fairer and more supportive process for parents with learning disabilities or difficulties involved in care proceedings.

Parental Advocacy for those with a LD

In response to the research findings, the Voice and Participation Service has formalised its parental advocacy support within the broader Independent Advocacy Initiative. Under this initiative, parents with identified learning difficulties, as documented during assessment, will now be eligible for dedicated advocacy support. This support will help them to better understand their plans, be informed of their rights, and more effectively communicate their views.

The Family Voice Worker attended the Black Advocacy Belt Annual Conference on 16th October and participated in follow-up online courses over the subsequent weeks, gaining insights and best practices for advocating effectively for parents.

Additionally, the Family Voice Worker and Parents Voice Ambassador have expanded their networks by participating in monthly meetings with other advocacy and voice service providers across the UK, facilitated by the Parents Families and Allies Network (PFAN). These connections have provided valuable advice, support, and shared expertise in enhancing advocacy services for parents and families.

Since August Family Voice has provided advocacy support to four parents during their families' Initial and Review Child Protection Conferences (ICPC/RCPC). Some of these meetings have been held in person, either in the parents' own homes or in other accessible and familiar settings, such as local GP surgeries, to ensure a comfortable environment for meaningful participation. Additionally, Family Voice supported two parents in joining their ICPC/RCPC reviews online, helping to facilitate their engagement despite potential barriers to attending in person.

Efforts were also made to engage three other parents ahead of their ICPC reviews. Unfortunately, some of these parents disengaged from the process following the initiation of the Public Law Outline (PLO) process, which underscores the challenges of sustaining engagement during difficult stages of care proceedings.

Training for Practitioners

FAB members are collaborating to develop training for the workforce that focuses on the experiences of individuals with learning disabilities (LD) and the social care interventions they receive. By incorporating their valuable lived experiences into the conversation, they aim to foster a more empathetic dialogue and improve the training being offered.

Bournemouth University Visit

FAB members recently visited Bournemouth University to engage with 24 student social workers, with the aim of exploring best practices and gathering feedback on effective strategies, tools, and methods for engaging with parents. During this session, FAB members shared real-world insights and experiences, encouraging an open dialogue where students could ask questions and provide their perspectives.

Through these discussions, FAB members and students explored a variety of engagement techniques and approaches, including:

- **Tools for Effective Communication:** Students shared innovative tools and methods they have encountered during their training, such as visual aids, simplified language resources, and digital engagement tools, which could be beneficial in helping parents understand complex information.

- **Strategies for Building Trust with Parents:** Recognising the importance of trust in social work, students provided feedback on approaches to foster trust with parents, such as active listening, transparency, and consistency in communication.
- **Feedback on Parental Engagement Challenges:** Students discussed potential barriers they face in engaging parents, including cultural differences, language barriers, and the stigma some parents may feel. They shared ideas on overcoming these barriers to improve rapport and collaboration with families.

The outcomes of this visit are expected to positively impact both the students and the FAB members, including:

- **Enhanced Student Preparedness:** By hearing from experienced advocates, students gain a deeper understanding of the practical challenges and ethical considerations of engaging with parents, which could improve their confidence and effectiveness in future roles.
- **New Ideas for FAB Initiatives:** Feedback from students provides FAB members with fresh ideas and perspectives, which could inform the development of new tools and resources for parental engagement. These insights may lead to more effective advocacy efforts, particularly in engaging parents who may be unfamiliar with social services.
- **Strengthened Partnership with Bournemouth University:** This visit reinforces the partnership between Wiltshire Council, FAB members, and Bournemouth University, opening doors for further collaboration. Future workshops, internships, or joint projects could be developed to support ongoing knowledge exchange and practical learning opportunities.

"The students reported that they massively valued the time that you gave them" (SW lecturer)

"The biggest take away for me is the importance of building relationships before giving feedback" (student SW)

Overall, this engagement with student social workers creates a mutual learning experience, potentially shaping best practices in parental advocacy and helping to prepare the next generation of social workers for more compassionate and inclusive practice.

FAB Magazine

Overview and Aims of the FAB Magazine

The inaugural edition of FAB Magazine is currently underway, designed to amplify the voices and experiences of parents and families navigating the child protection system in Wiltshire. It will particularly focus on those involved in children's hearings, child protection investigations, and the care system. The magazine seeks to foster understanding, challenge existing practices, and advocate for changes that provide stronger support and respect for families.

Key Objectives:

- **Empowering Parents:** FAB Magazine will empower parents by providing a space for them to share their stories, insights, and perspectives, helping them feel heard and validated within the system.

- **Promoting Advocacy and Rights:** The magazine will champion parents' rights and emphasise the importance of treating parents as equals in interactions with social workers and other professionals within the child protection system.
- **Providing Resources and Information:** A dedicated resources section will offer a directory of organisations that provide advocacy and support for families navigating child protection.
- **Raising Awareness of the FAB Group:** The magazine will spread awareness of the FAB Group's mission and work within Wiltshire to enhance services for parents.

Content Highlights:

FAB Magazine will feature a range of compelling content, including:

- **Personal Narratives:** First-hand accounts from parents and grandparents will share experiences with child protection investigations, children's hearings, and navigating the complexities of the care system.
- **Professional Advice:** Contributions from social workers, legal experts, and advocates will provide practical guidance on topics such as subject access requests, contact arrangements, and building effective support networks.

Impact Goals:

By giving parents a platform to share their experiences, challenge existing practices, and advocate for their rights, FAB Magazine aspires to:

- Reduce the isolation and stigma often associated with involvement in child protection.
- Foster greater understanding and empathy between parents, professionals, and the wider community.
- Ultimately improve the overall experiences of families engaging with the child protection system.

National Consultations:

This quarter our voice groups contributed to two national consultations in October.

Local Government Association (LGA) Mental Health Consultation (17/10/2024):

- 10 representatives across our voice groups attended- including Young Carers, SEND, Children in Care, Youth Justice and the Wiltshire Youth Council.
- Attendees shared their views around mental health support with The Local Government Association.
- Young people also reflected on the findings of the 'Children and Young People's Emotional Wellbeing Survey' which was delivered by Wiltshire Councils Public Health Team.
- Following the consultation the LGA will be creating an informative report to be shared with the government and local authorities on how best to support young people's experiences of mental health.

The Children's Society Financial Exploitation Youth Voice Consultation (21/10/2024):

- 11 representatives across our voice groups attended- including Young Carers, SEND, Children in Care, Youth Justice and the Wiltshire Youth Council.
- Attendees shared their views around financial exploitation with The Children's Society.
- Following the consultation their views will be included in The Children's Society's report which will inform the government and Local Authorities on how best to support young people experiencing financial exploitation.

Future Activities:

- Work with a 'One Council' approach with Public Health to deliver a Child and Young Persons Emotional Wellbeing Summit in February 2025.

Key Outcomes:

- Wiltshire young people have contributed to national consultations which will ensure they are heard when reports are produced and policies are developed in these areas.
- Young people have felt heard and empowered knowing that their voice is being heard

"The mental health written summary, it couldn't be better in words, honestly it sums it all up in one. It just feels like you guys listen to my points." Young Carer Council Member

Wiltshire Youth Council

The Wiltshire Youth Council continues to enhance the voices of our young people across Wiltshire and provides an invaluable opportunity to contribute to youth democracy. This period we have had an additional 3 schools sign up to the initiative.

Meetings:

The Wiltshire Youth Council continue to meet once a month via a hybrid meeting hosted at County Hall, Trowbridge. Youth Councillors have had the opportunity to consult with different professionals and initiatives across the council including the following:

- Provided feedback to Public Health to inform their development of the No Worries Service and the new Condom App which was being launched. (<https://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/article/1408/Sexual-health>).
- Provided insightful feedback for the library 5 year strategy, including how to improve the services offered to young people in Wiltshire Council Libraries.
- Community Engagement- Wiltshire Youth Councillors were given the opportunity to review the results of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and provide feedback on how more of the young people population can be reached.
- Councillors, including the portfolio holder for SEND and Inclusion and Area Boards have attended to provide an insight into the work they do and offer a Q&A opportunity.

“Thank you for having me at the meeting and being so accommodating. It was valuable to hear from that cohort and they had really insightful questions” Public Health Practitioner

“Thank you for so much for introducing Wendy and myself to the Youth Council this week and to spend time gathering very valuable feedback on their view of Wiltshire Libraries. What a great bunch of teenagers with informed views, willingness to share experience, articulate and confident. We were impressed with how much they already knew about libraries and their great ideas about what they could like and provide.” Library Development and Communities Manager

Members of Youth Parliament (MYP):

Our MYPs have started their work on promoting Wiltshire Youth Councils voice on a national scale.

- **MYP Annual Conference-** Wiltshire MYPs attended the UK Youth Parliament annual Conference Residential on 26th to 27th October at Coventry University. This was a chance to contribute their views nationally, and influence the development of the manifestos which will be reviewed and presented at the House Of Commons in March 2025.

Here is an **outline of the MYP’s additional responsibilities:**

- be a champion for young people’s issues locally and nationally
- work with their locally elected councillors and MPs to promote youth voice
- attend regional conventions of the UKYP (three Saturdays per year)
- attend the annual conference of UKYP (a residential weekend away)
- attend an annual debate in the House of Commons
- deliver the Make Your Mark youth voice campaign and other UKYP campaigns

Hygiene Initiative:

Wiltshire Youth Councillors have decided that they would like to raise donations to the charity Re-Fresh who ‘provides toiletry and sanitary items to children and youth in need.’ Along with donations Youth Councillors are doing the following:

- Raising awareness of supporting vulnerable groups of young people.
- Raising awareness of period poverty
- Action: Youth Councillors are working in their schools to encourage donations, they have been given until Monday 16th December to raise as much awareness and contributions as possible. Boxes will then be combined to deliver to the Re-Fresh donation points in Wiltshire.
- See more details on refresh here (<https://www.communityactionwestwilts.org/refresh>)

Outcomes:

- Our 28 elected Youth Councillors are representing the voices of young people across Wiltshire.

- We have representatives from our SEND, Young Carers and Children in Care groups who raise awareness on behalf vulnerable groups.
- Youth Councillors have met with different guests and been able to feedback their insights on how services are shaped and how funding is spent.
- Youth Councillors are working towards their chosen awareness raising projects, and more information will follow on completion.
- Young people attending get to experience youth democracy and lots of skills such as public speaking, minute taking, and 'youth inspection' skills.

Activities going forward:

Each full youth council meeting will continue to have a guest invited who will seek the youth councillors' views on important topics such as environmental issues, transport, or mental health the members of youth council will have a say in how policy at the council is shaped. With support from Wiltshire's Voice and Participation Service, the Youth Council will take part in activities such as youth inspections, advising on how money is spent for young people and advocating for young people where they live.

2. Independent Advocacy Service

What is Independent Advocacy?

Independent advocacy ensures that children and young people have their voices heard during important decisions about their lives. Advocates are completely independent from other services, meaning they do not represent the views of social workers, carers, or any other professionals. Unlike other professionals who work in a child's "best interests," advocates act as a mouthpiece for the person being supported, ensuring their views, wishes, and feelings are communicated exactly as they want them to be heard. The advocate's role is to empower the person to express their opinions and make sure those opinions are taken seriously in all meetings and decision-making processes.

Our Offer

Our advocacy service typically follows a three-meeting process:

1. Initial Meeting: The advocate meets with the individual receiving support to understand their wishes and feelings. These are then shared with the relevant professionals involved in the upcoming meeting.
2. Professionals Meeting: The advocate attends the meeting, either alongside the individual, or on their behalf.
3. Feedback: If the individual would like feedback on the meeting's outcome, they can request this from the advocate. However, it remains the lead worker's responsibility to explain how decisions were made.

For Non Instructed Advocacy (taking action on behalf of someone who is unable to clearly indicate their views or wishes), the process will be determined on a case by case basis.

Advocacy Service Criteria:

All children who are CLA, CP and SEND are provided with the offer for independent advocacy which they can choose to opt out from.

People eligible for advocacy include:

- Child involved in CP
- Parent with SEN involved in CP (ICPC and RCPC only)
- Looked-after children, including:
 - Residential special schools
 - Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC)
- Children with SEND (Representation of Views, Independence, Support with Rights, Participation)
- Living in kinship care
- Children in need
- Care leavers
- Children subject to the Mental Capacity Act (aged 16-18)
- Children detained under the Mental Health Act
- Homeless young people (16-17 years)
- Young carers and young adult carers (up to 24)

A new referral form was integrated into the Liquid Logic system, going live on 10th October 2024. This streamlined process has already led to 54 referrals since launch. Previously, a temporary Microsoft Form collected 37 referrals between July and October, which demonstrates a substantial increase in accessibility and use following system integration. The following data has been collected from the new Liquid Logic form so only reflects 1 month's reporting.

Type of meeting where advocacy is needed	Count of Type of meeting
Subsequent CLA Review	12
Second CLA Review	11
Initial Child Protection Conference	8
Review Child Protection Conference	7
First CLA Review	3
Prior to Pathway Plan (when CYP turns 16)	3
	1
Other/ Not Applicable (blank)	6
Grand Total	54

The below table represents the referral reasons, the values in this field may be higher due to some children having multiple reasons selected.

Category	Value
CLA (Children Looked After)	30
CP (Child Protection)	15
CIN (Children in Need)	2
SEND Specific (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities)	3

Young Carers	4
Mental Capacity Act	2
Kinship Care/SGO (Special Guardianship Orders)	8
Homeless (Aged between 16 and 17)	1

The average time from referral to ICPC is 10 days, and to CLA Review is 42 days. These timelines allow advocates sufficient time to build rapport with children, gather their wishes, and adequately prepare for meetings, enhancing the child-centered approach in every case.

Integration into existing workflows, including amending the Section 47 form, has brought advocacy considerations into earlier stages of the child protection process.

The below table represents which team supports the children that have been referred, the CiC North Team have higher numbers, which is due to them holding the unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, who we have had 9 referrals for.

Teams who Support Referred children	Number of Children
Children In Care (North)	16
CYPDT	9
Children In Care (South)	7
Support And Safeguarding (West W/M)	7
Support And Safeguarding (North)	7
Support And Safeguarding (South)	6
Allocated Team	1
(blank)	1
(blank)	
Grand Total	54

Feedback

Staff feedback highlights the advocacy service's impact:

"The advocacy reports you provided were excellent and really captured the children." (Social Worker)

"Thanks for sorting it out for me! Really grateful, meant a meaningful meeting could go ahead...so it was invaluable!" (Independent Reviewing Officer on short-notice advocacy)

Child feedback from four closed cases indicated that children felt their views were genuinely heard, and they were satisfied with meeting outcomes.

Since 10 October - 13 visits have taken place with children to attain their wishes and feelings and 11 professional meetings have been attended by an Advocate to speak on behalf of a child.

Moving forward, a "Wishes and Feelings" form has been introduced within Liquid Logic. This addition will allow for data on recurring themes in children's perspectives, further supporting service improvement and thematic analysis.

Expansion and Capacity-Building

The team is recruiting one full-time and one part-time Independent Advocate to join the current two part-time staff. These roles were factored into the original contract and ensures sustained support for children and timely advocacy service delivery.

The Independent Advocacy Service has made significant strides in operational efficiency, child-centred support, and collaboration with staff and other teams. Through system integration, timely engagement, and continuous expansion, the service is well-equipped to adapt to growing needs and foster positive outcomes for children and young people.

3. Volunteering

Volunteer Recruitment

The ongoing recruitment of new volunteers remains challenging, reflecting trends across the volunteer sector. The team is holding regular meetings with the Communications team to develop a strategic marketing approach, including a rolling recruitment programme with four annual training courses. This ensures prospective volunteers can access training within three months of expressing interest. Plans are underway for two main recruitment campaigns each year, supplemented by continuous advertising to maintain interest and awareness throughout the year.

Mentoring

Primary Mentoring

Over this period, the primary mentoring programme supported 44 children, with notable changes in participation. September saw the formation of 12 new mentor-child matches, while July included the closure of 14 mentorships. Three children participated in additional mentoring sessions up to July, and 15 have continued into the current academic year. Feedback from closed cases highlights positive outcomes: children were more able to express their feelings, felt supported, gained confidence, and grew in independence. Nine children's schools reported improvements, particularly in tolerance of others and openness in discussing feelings.

Three students who transitioned to secondary school in September are part of a trial programme, continuing with their primary mentors through Year 7. These students have demonstrated improvements in independence, and one is notably progressing in maturity and forming friendships.

Community Mentoring

Three young people continued to receive community mentoring. One transitioned smoothly into secondary school, another has developed confidence through a 3D printing hobby that enhances his mentoring sessions, and a young person post-18 has received support after interventions with the Youth Justice Service and the Emerald Team. Another child received mentoring for two months before feeling ready to return to school after initially being homeschooled.

Volunteer recruitment challenges continue to affect mentor availability, with waiting lists managed by temporary support from a Young Persons Support Worker until suitable matches are found.

Expanding the Advocacy Offer

The team will be increasing its mentoring offer, this will now include children that are victim of crime and care leaver mentoring, previously the Grand Mentors Scheme

IV Scheme

In September, the team organised an activity day at Thoulstone Park near Westbury, where 30 young people and their Independent Visitors enjoyed activities like archery, zip lines, and climbing walls. This event fostered connection and engagement among participants.



KPI Data for Quarter 2 (from Liquid Logic):

- **Referrals:** 3 in July
- **Assessments Completed:** 5 in July, 1 in August
- **Matches Made:** 2 in July, 3 in August, 3 in September
- **Visit Data:** 213 visits arranged, with 187 completed, totalling over 600 hours of engagement

Currently, 19% of Wiltshire’s children in care have an Independent Visitor, reflecting a 1% increase from Quarter 1. Three new IVs were recruited, with five young people on hold and 25 on the waiting list, six of whom reside out of county.

Number of open IV cases				117
-pre-referred status				4
-referred status				5
-assessed status				18
-matched status				87
-matched for 0-1 yrs				21
-matched for 1-2 yrs				23
-matched for 2-3 yrs				12
-matched for 3-4 yrs				14
-matched for 4-5 yrs				5
-matched for 5 plus yrs				12
-on hold status				2
Current CLA				460
- % with a matched IV				19%

Appropriate Adults

The Voice and Participation Support Worker (VPSW) has focused on engaging with first-time entrants (FTEs) into police custody, either through follow-up outreach or in-custody support. During these encounters, the VPSW discusses the custody process, voluntary support from the Youth Justice

Service, and the benefits of engaging with available resources. Access to custody remains limited pending police vetting.

The VPSW is conducting ongoing data collection to assess the impact of trained Appropriate Adults (AAs) compared to family members or guardians acting as AAs, focusing on how each affects a child’s decision to engage with a solicitor. This includes voluntary attendance interviews as well as cases involving children detained in police custody. Data from daily Police Electronic Notifications is being gathered and analysed to provide insights into the effectiveness of trained AAs versus family members in this role. Early findings indicate that trained AAs often have a stronger influence on children’s decisions due to their expertise, which enables them to advise and sometimes override a child’s initial decision while explaining the solicitor’s role.

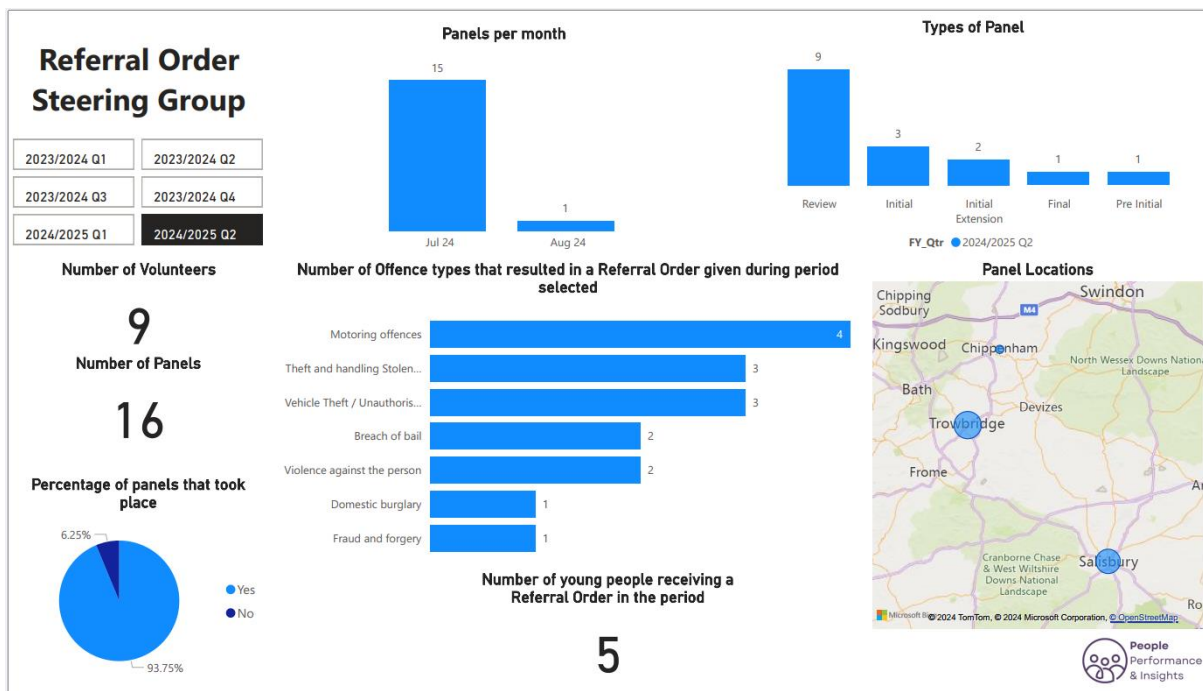
This data also monitors response times for AAs arriving in custody, instances where children are held overnight, and other demographic factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, type of alleged offence, and outcomes. The project is in its early stages, with data collection and analysis ongoing to inform future best practices.

Rise in Assaults on Emergency Workers:

A project initially focused on girls arrested for assaulting emergency workers has expanded to include both boys and all types of assaults. Data collection has begun, with plans to interview children involved in these incidents. Findings will be analysed and presented to the Youth Justice Executive Board.

Panel Members

The following information contains the panel stats for the period that is collected by the Youth Justice Service:



At the time of writing this report, we were unable to access the data from September and therefore it has not been possible to make comparisons with the previous quarter’s data. Feedback from participants of the panels is being collected and analysed by one of our volunteer panel members which will be reported on in Quarter 3.

-End-

