



Open Report on behalf of Heather Sandy, Executive Director - Children's Services

Report to:	Corporate Parenting Panel
Date:	9 March 2023
Subject:	Voices for Choices (V4C) Update Report

Summary:

This report gives a summary and overview of:

- Activities regarding Voices for Choices (V4C) and the Big Conversation between October 2022 – January 2023.
- Actions to support future V4C planning and progress.

V4C is Lincolnshire's Children in Care Council with the aim being to share experiences of being in care in Lincolnshire and to inform teams who support children in care what does and does not work for them. V4C meetings are held within Children's Services locality quadrants and are delivered by Senior Youth and Community Development Workers and supported by Children's Services Participation Officers. Big Conversation events bring children in care together with senior leaders to hear their views and feedback to help inform service development.

Actions Required:

The Corporate Parenting Panel is invited to provide comment and steer regarding:

- (1) V4C activities and meetings undertaken within the reporting period; and,
- (2) Future planning and delivery of V4C meetings and activities.

1. Background

The Big Conversation

The most recent Big Conversation event was held in October half term.

Date of Meeting	Venue	Number of young people attended
25 October 2022	The Showroom, Lincoln	20

During the event there were positive discussions between children, young people and professionals concerning the effective support they were receiving and the range of social activities that were available to them.

A session within the event focused on asking the children and young people about one thing they would like to change about the care and support they received and there was feedback to be considered regarding children and young people requesting more time with staff and more opportunities to spend time with friends and have sleepovers. Feedback from young people about being identified as being in care within school times has been raised with schools. There was also some discussion around children and young people having a consistent Social Worker and how it can be frustrating for them when their Social Worker changes, and also some feedback to them to help them understand why a change in Social Worker sometimes takes place.

The planned FAB Awards for June 2023 was also discussed. This is an award ceremony for children in care and care leavers and we received feedback about the types of activities to be planned as part of the day and also the actual award that will be given out. The feedback has since been incorporated into planning of the event.

A discussion about V4C itself was also held to receive views and feedback from the children and young people concerning what potential changes could increase numbers of attendance. The children and young people made a range of points including:

- More meetings to take place during day times within school holidays;
- Merging smaller groups together;
- Wider awareness raising and publicity; and
- Discussing V4C with schools as there may be options to engage with children in care within schools.

This feedback is being included as part of a wider project to review V4C and consider alternative models of delivery in 2023. This will include the next Big Conversation in April 2023 which will be focused on attracting new children and young people and staff to attend to learn about V4C and to give feedback on how they would like V4C to operate.

V4C delivery October 2022 – January 2023

During this reporting period the delivery of V4C groups have been continuing to focus on holding face-to-face meetings within Council youth centre buildings and other settings where there are established risk assessments in place.

The details below provide a summary of V4C sessions across the localities:

East Lindsey

Attendances at V4C meetings in East Lindsey remain challenging with a maximum on 2 young people attending monthly meetings.

Workers have trying to improve attendance by sending emails to all our known young people, carers and social workers and will be looking at speaking with local schools to explore options to highlight V4C activities. Currently there is not a children's residential care home in East Lindsey but with a home being built in the locality it is envisaged that a V4C group will be created within the new home.

Lincoln and West Lindsey

An overview of meetings held is provided below including visits to the residential children's home within the locality. Due to a staffing vacancy, invitations to young people in the North/South Kesteven have been sent to invite attendance in Lincoln.

Date of meeting	Venue	Number of young people attended
14 Sept 2022	Lincoln Youth Matters (LYM) Youth Centre	6
20 Sept 2022	Northholme Residential Home, Gainsborough	5
12 Oct 2022	LYM	7
09 Nov 2022	LYM	8
22 Nov 2022	Northholme Residential Home, Gainsborough	5
20 Dec 2022	Christmas Pantomime at Trinity Arts Centre Gainsborough	8
18 Jan 2023	LYM	9

Discussions within the sessions have been ongoing with regard to seeking views and feedback about how V4C could attract more young people to attend with feedback received including to hold day time meetings as well as evening sessions, to meet in half terms with activities and trips offered, to hold meetings with different age groups and to invite Social Workers and other professionals to meet the young people and speak with them about issues, and to have V4C branded clothing.

The group are also planning to have representatives at the Designated Teacher Conference in 2023 and are discussing their contribution to this event.

Planning is also being undertaken with regard to future content for a V4C promotional video.

The group have also raised the importance of them hearing back results from their feedback and that they would like Children's Services staff to come along to V4C meetings at times as well as meeting up at the Big Conversation events.

Boston and South Holland

An overview of the meetings held is provided below. There remains a stable group of young people attending but there have not been any new referrals over this reporting period. V4C staff have emailed all know carers and Social Workers in the locality area with details of V4C and publicity but this is not resulting in new attendees currently.

Date of meeting	Venue	Number of young people attended
12 Oct 2022	Boston Youth Centre	4
09 Nov 2022	Boston Youth Centre	4
14 Dec 2022	Boston Youth Centre	4
11 Jan 2023	Boston Youth Centre	4

The young people have continued their work on the future of V4C, thinking about aspects about V4C they enjoy and also would like to change:

- They enjoy doing different activities, meeting with the workers, cooking and sports.
- They dislike having to come to the group straight after school, then having to go straight to bed when they get home due to the travel involved, and not having enough time to do external activities.
- They thought it would be good to have a different logo, and team merchandise such as t-shirts, jumpers, or hats, team backpacks, or badges.
- They would prefer to make V4C every 6 weeks during the school holidays so there would be more time for activities.
- Feedback was also given about venues to hold future meetings and Big Conversation events, which will be considered in future planning this year.

Anti-bullying week was also imminent, and there were discussed online safety on social media:

- They thought social media was good because there are some good people on there, and it is something to do. However, they considered there were more bad aspects including bad people on there, getting hacked, bad language and getting addicted.
- They thought there was a lot of online bullying but knew they would be able to talk to their teachers, the police, or their carers if they were being bullied, and they could 'block, delete, or report' the bullies.

V4C Planning – Formal Review

There have been and remain ongoing attempts to raise awareness of V4C to increase attendances. Key to this is encouraging staff and carers to discuss V4C with children and young people and referring them to the Participation Team so they can be contacted, and any support needed for them to attend can be put in place.

The Children's Services Participation Officers have visited a range of teams over the past 12 months and shared publicity information to raise awareness of V4C and to request that workers speak with children and young people about V4C to encourage attendance.

However, the situation remains that attendances have not increased over this reporting period.

As a result, a new Children's Services V4C Development Group has been established which includes representatives from across front line teams alongside staff involved directly in delivering and co-ordinating the V4C meetings. The first meeting was held on Wednesday 1st February where a range of feedback and views were shared regarding the current V4C model of delivery and the challenge to increase attendance and engagement. As a result, over 2023 it is proposed that a new model of delivery will be established which provisionally may include:

- Meetings being held within half terms and school holidays. There is some feedback from young people that evening meetings are a barrier to attendance and that daytime meetings are better attended with more time for activities and travel possible.
- A potential more centralised meeting model. Currently there are 44 V4C meetings across the 4 quadrant areas over a 12-month period and there is a view that a more structured and focused volume of meetings would support greater awareness and the development of a group identity within V4C.
- Working with Designated Teachers within schools to seek to establish links with children in care who would be interested in becoming members of V4C and to meet discreetly within schools.

2. Conclusion

- Ongoing work will continue to publicise V4C and review meeting options, with an aim to gain children and young people's views to encourage attendance and engagement.
- Although attendances have not increased during this reporting period, there is a real desire within Children's Services teams to address the challenge to grow and develop V4C, as evidenced by the establishment of the V4C development group.
- Based on feedback received it does seem reasonable to now develop and trial a new and different model of V4C delivery in line with the broad outline described in this report as an attempt to refresh V4C and grow the involvement of young people within it.

3. Consultation

a) Risks and Impact Analysis

Risk assessments are carried out via the Senior Youth and Community Development Workers and Participation Officers.

4. Background Papers

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

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