



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

Report to:	<b>Corporate Parenting Panel</b>
Date:	<b>09 November 2023</b>
Subject:	<b>Lincolnshire Children in Care Council - Voices for Choices (V4C) Update Report</b>

**Summary:**

This report gives a summary and overview of:

- Activities regarding V4C and the Big Conversation between the end of April - end August 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. Alongside V4C meetings, there are also Big Conversation events which bring children and young people 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.
2. Future planning and delivery of V4C meetings and activities.

**1. Background**

During this reporting period, the most recent meeting between children and young people within the Children in Care Council, senior managers and elected members took place is summarised, along with other Children in Care Council work and also the FAB Awards ceremony and activities in June 2023, which is a key aspect of Children in Care Council focus.

## **The Big Conversation**

The most recent Big Conversation event was held during the Easter holidays.

Date of Meeting	Venue	Number of young people attended
April 2023	The Showroom, Lincoln	17

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.

The 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 awards that will be given out. The feedback was incorporated into planning for the event and will also be included in plans for the 2024 FAB Awards.

There was also further 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.

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:

- Meetings to take place during day times within school holidays
- Merging smaller groups together
- Wider awareness raising and publicity

This feedback was included as part of a wider project to review V4C and consider alternative models of delivery in 2023, including focusing on attracting new children, young people and staff to attend to learn about V4C and to give feedback on how they would like V4C to operate.

## **The FAB Awards – 17 June 2023**

Children and young people were consulted with in advance to inform the planning of the 2023 FAB Awards. The event celebrates the achievements of the children and young people, and this year was the first event held since the lifting of Covid restrictions, and was held at Lincoln University, with the charity SoundLincs commissioned to support the planning and delivery on the day.

The day included a range of activities in the morning, a lunch and the awards ceremony in the afternoon, with awards presented from senior managers and elected members from

the Council, and representatives from Barnardo's Leaving Care Service and Lincoln University.

In total approximately 250 children and young people attended to receive their awards with an overall audience including carers and professionals of approximately 500.

An evaluation of the event has been completed with overwhelming positive feedback, including a sample below:

*'I've had a brilliant day'*

*'So fabulous to have so many activities available for all age ranges, both inside and outside. As an adult I've even enjoyed having a go'*

*'This means so much for the children here'*

*'It is really wonderful to see so many smiling faces'*

*'Such a brilliant atmosphere'*

*'It was a truly remarkable event and I was so proud of all the work that has gone into it.'*

*'Wow'*

Initial planning has also commenced to begin considering the 2024 FAB Awards and this has included consulting with children and young people regarding the theme for next time.

### **Children in Care Council Meetings**

Attendance and engagement of children and young people have remained challenging since the disruption of working arrangements throughout Covid restrictions and the relaxing of these in 2022. As a result, a consultation was held with children, young people, carers and professionals to gain feedback on what could encourage increased participation and what barriers existed to attendance.

Feedback was received that evening meetings held in school term time was a barrier to attending due to time constraints, and also that the format of several meetings across the county meant that groups were too small.

As a result, it was agreed that a shift to centralised meetings within the daytime would be trialled with a view that this could increase attendance and engagement. Consequently, the Children in Care Council meeting would become a full day and this would allow:

- Less barriers regarding travel and time, with transport provided/funded where needed.
- More time for the Children in Care Council meeting to take place and have discussions.
- A lunch to be provided.
- A social/fun activity to be offered in the afternoon.
- Meetings to mirror the arrangements of Big Conversations which have seen increased attendance.

- Care Leavers to attend and speak with children in care about their experiences in a single setting.

An initial programme of dates and activities has been developed and widely shared with frontline teams in Children’s Services and carers:

Date	Venue / activity
School summer holiday – 1 September	Hartsholme Country Park – orienteering activity provided by Park Ranger
Autumn half term – 25 October	Lincoln Escape Rooms
Christmas – 9 December	Meeting at county offices followed by pantomime at Theatre Royal, Lincoln

Future meetings will take place across the county in line with planning and feedback from children and young people.

The September meeting was a successful day in terms of attendance and outcomes from the day:

Date of meeting	Venue	Number of young people attended
1 September 2023	Hartsholme Country Park, Lincoln	13

The meeting focused on Lincolnshire Children’s Services **Caring Promise** (see Appendix A) as it was agreed that it is the promises within it should be kept to ensure all children and young people in care are supported to help them in their lives.

The following provides a summary of discussions within the meeting and the views of children and young people:

- The young people attending the meeting generally knew about their Independent Reviewing Officers and what their role involved.
- Not all of the young people had seen or were aware of the Caring Promise, with only four of the 13 attending stating they had seen the information previously.
- The group talked about being involved in decision making and agreed that by being involved in the recruitment and interviewing process of Social Workers would be a good way to do this.

**Education:** The Caring Promise outlines the importance of children in care being supported with regard to their education and this generated feedback about

experiences in schools and how children in care are labelled as 'in care' and that other students hear about this which can lead to bullying. Some members of the group talked about feeling targeted as a result of being called out of class lessons for review meetings. This has been fed back to Independent Chairs Team Managers to ensure meetings are held at appropriate times for young people. The group talked about the option of making a training video for staff to help raise awareness of this issue and the importance of confidentiality.

**Leisure:** The group discussed their experiences of holidays and some felt that they have not sometimes been included in family holidays and went on respite instead.

**Positive experiences of being in care:**

There was enthusiastic discussion about some of the positive experiences that have come from their care experience, and it was fed back that this included:

- Opportunities provided that would not have access to including Air Cadets, horse riding and memberships of sports clubs.
- Additional support given at school and with educational opportunities generally.
- Overall better chances in life.
- More people around who want to try to help and support.
- Feeling listened to in school and life.

**Ideas to develop and grow V4C:**

- Visiting care homes to talk to others about becoming members.
- Making a video / leaflet to help raise awareness to encourage others to join.
- Developing branded V4C items such as hoodies.
- Speaking to schools and colleges as a way to meet other children in care.

## **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.

The Children in Care Council remains a valuable mechanism to capture the views and feelings from children and young people in care and to share with senior managers and elected members. The key to success remains in frontline teams supporting this by referring children and young people to the opportunity to become involved and supporting them to attend.

Ongoing joined up work will continue with Barnardo's Leaving Care Service to support Care Leavers being involved in the Children in Care Council as they provide a valuable insight and points of discussions.

### 3. Consultation

#### a) Risks and Impact Analysis

Risk assessments are completed and collated by Children's Services Participation Officers.

### 4. Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	Caring Promise Leaflet 2021

### 5. 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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