



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

Report to:	Corporate Parenting Panel
Date:	09 May 2024
Subject:	Lincolnshire Children in Care Council - Voices for Choices (V4C) Update Report

Summary:

This report gives a summary and overview of:

- Activities regarding Lincolnshire Children's Services Children in Care Council (V4C) between October 2023 and April 2024.
- 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. The meetings and activities bring children and young people in care together with senior leaders in the Council 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 meetings between children and young people within the Children in Care Council, senior managers and elected members that took place are summarised, along with other Children in Care Council related work and planning for the annual FAB Awards ceremony and activities for June 2024, which is a key aspect of the Children in Care Council focus.

Children in Care Council meetings

In 2023, children and young people were consulted about how they would like Children in Care Council meetings to operate, and 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. As a result, 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.

The first meeting in this format was held in September 2023 where 13 young people attended, which was an increase from previous attendances.

During this reporting period the following meetings have taken place or are due to take place:

Date of Meeting	Venue	Number of young people attended
October half term	Lincoln Escape Rooms	19
28 November 2023	Online meeting to plan training project	6
December 2023	Theatre Royal, Lincoln	14
23 January 2024	Online meeting to plan training project	6
February Half Term	Screddington Community Centre, Sleaford (including cooking activity)	4
21 March 2024	Online meeting to plan training project	6

Easter Holiday	Boston Stump	5
May half term	The Active Arena, Lincoln	To be confirmed after 30 May.

Children in Care Council Meetings

During this reporting period, the following discussions and work has taken place:

Development of a training resource

Meetings and discussions have been focused on the Children in Care Council producing a training resource presentation for professionals working in the children’s workforce in schools and across Lincolnshire that will aim to give the views of children and young people in care with regard to their experiences and how they can be supported and communicated with, in particular in terms of challenging some stereotypes and assumptions. Specific views of the young people about what they feel the training should address include:

- Explaining what foster caring involves.
- The effect of labelling as being in care.
- Challenging bullying of children and young people in care.
- Explaining the different types of care.
- Discussing the different reasons why children and young people are in care.
- Explaining that it is not the fault of the child/young person that they are in care.
- Outlining a range of reasons why children and young people are in care.
- Showing that being in care is not something to be worried about and talking about how it has helped.

It is planned for the training presentation resource to be developed for October 2024 and this will be cascaded via Team Managers in Children’s Services and to schools via Education Support.

Review of the Council’s Offer to Care Leavers

At the request of Barnardo’s Leaving Care Service, a group of six care-experienced young people reviewed and fed back about the Council’s Offer to Care Leavers which is available on the Council’s website.

Feedback from the young people included a recommendation for a specific leaflet to be created detailing information about the following when leaving care:

- Direct debits
- Standing orders
- Gas/electric
- Credit cards

- Council tax
- Money/bills
- Mental health support
- Give leaflets to young people before they leave care, so they have an understanding/preparation.

There is a rolling programme of updates via the Leaving Care Transformation Board, and it is intended revisions will be led by the Leaving Care Service and Children's Services Leads. Parallel to this, additional consultation is being undertaken with care leavers, and this is due to be completed by 26 April and findings from this and the consultation with V4C will inform the future website provision and content. The timescales in relation to changes will be determined within the refresh Leaving Care transformation plan.

Review of Independent Chair and Independent Review Officer (IRO) Feedback Form

Members of the V4C meetings have also reviewed the feedback form used by Independent Chairs and IRO's and worked with managers for the service to suggest and approve the form to be redesigned to be more young person friendly.

FAB Awards 2024

The annual FAB Awards is planned for June 2024 and work is taking place to involve members of V4C in the organisation of the event and involving them in the delivery on the day including them presenting on the day/handing out of medals.

East Midlands Local Authority Regional Participation – Training Resource Project

Children's Services in Lincolnshire is a member of the East Midlands Regional Participation Leads group along with the other local authorities in the region, and is leading a project to develop an online learning resource that will record the views of children and young people in care to share with Social Work and Youth Work students to help them understand how to communicate and support children in care. The project is being co-ordinated with the Social Work department at Nottingham Trent University and planning meetings are ongoing currently.

This regional project is planned to complete the training resource by the end of 2024 and it is expected that it will be shared with professionals across the Children's workforce via the Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Partnership.

Positive experiences of being in care

There has been, again, 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.
- 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.

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. It remains a challenge to engage children and young people to attend the meetings.
- 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. 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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