

DECISION-MAKER:	CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY PANEL
SUBJECT:	PARTICIPATION ACTIVITY WITH LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS
DATE OF DECISION:	25 MARCH 2021
REPORT OF:	EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CHILDREN AND LEARNING

<u>CONTACT DETAILS</u>			
Executive Director	Title	Children and Learning	
	Name:	Robert Henderson	Tel: 023 8083 4899
	E-mail	robert.henderson@southampton.gov.uk	
Author:	Title	Voice of the Child Programme Lead	
	Name:	Jenny Molloy	Tel: 023 8083 4102
	E-mail	Jenny.molloy@southampton.gov.uk	
	Title	Quality Assurance Unit Manager and Principal Social Worker	
	Name:	Stuart Webb	
	E-mail	stuart.webb@southampton.gov.uk	

STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY	
Not applicable	
BRIEF SUMMARY	
This paper provides an overview of participatory activity being undertaken with looked after children and care leavers by Jenny Molloy, a care experienced trainer and facilitator commissioned by the Children and Learning Service to increase the level of engagement of looked after children in service development and improvement.	
RECOMMENDATIONS:	
	(i) That the Scrutiny Panel reviews and comments on the initiatives outlined in this report.
	(ii) That members of the Scrutiny Panel commit to completing Total Respect training.
	(iii) That the Executive Director provides assurance at the next Scrutiny Panel meeting that the issues affected the looked after children summarised in paragraph 19 have been addressed.
REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS	
1.	It is important that the Children and Learning Service ensures that its participatory activity is robust as part of its corporate parenting responsibilities. Looked after children and care leavers should be supported to have their say in their care and the local authority should listen and act upon their insights.

	Participation is also an area that Ofsted assesses local authority children's services on as part of the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework.
ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED	
2.	None
DETAIL (Including consultation carried out)	
3.	<p>In 2018, the Department of Education (DfE) published its corporate parenting principles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people • to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings • to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people • to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners • to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people • for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and • to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living <p>Good participatory activity with looked after children and care leavers supports the Council and partners to adhere to these principles.</p>
4.	<p>In 2019, Ofsted reviewed Southampton's participatory activity and found that:</p> <p><i>Senior leaders and politicians have launched a wide range of initiatives for children in care, demonstrating energy and zeal in their corporate parenting roles. The new lead member for children is bringing fresh impetus, scrutiny and insights in his role as chair of the corporate parenting board. Children's participation and feedback is widespread, multi-layered imaginative and influential.</i></p>
5.	<p>Unfortunately, the onset of the Covid pandemic impacted. By December 2020, the Children in Care Council and care leaver's forum were not functioning and the dedicated looked after children participation worker had started a secondment. Positively, two care experienced apprentices have started in the service; however, they are being inducted and therefore need time to develop in role.</p>
6.	<p>In order to ensure that robust participatory activity resumed at pace the Children and Learning Service commissioned Jenny Molloy, a care experienced trainer and facilitator to work with looked after children and care leavers. Working with the corporate participation team, the impact of this action has been immediate and in the remaining section of this report we set out the different areas of work in train.</p>

	Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum
7.	Central to any good participation work is the direct engagement with children and young people. During the pandemic, children were not engaging. However, we have worked with the social workers and Independent Reviewing Officers to reach children and young people to form two new groups, which have been officially named this week at the group meeting.
8.	We have 21 engaged children and young people, who have all attended regularly. There was a large dip in last week's numbers, down from 21 to 8, which was reported as being due to the children's other commitments during half term.
9.	The decision by the group was to name the groups with Southampton Voices Unite and Southampton Voices Unite seniors. It was very interesting to see the determination in the children and young people with having the inclusion of Southampton in their group name. They felt very strongly that they were 'Southampton children' and therefore wanted to be known as such. This is a fantastic sign of a solid sense of belonging which can be built from within these groups. There will be a soft launch of both groups, with the formal launch being at the Love our Children week in September.
	The Work Schedule - 'Love our Children – Corporate Parenting'
10.	Given that we now have a programme of work up and running, the programme title that has been chosen by our children and young people is – Love Our Children – Corporate Parenting, with the Corporate in Corporate Parenting purposefully crossed through, with the idea that the corporate parenting becomes more parenting and less corporate.
11.	<p>The work schedule over the next 3 months includes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Design Work the Terms of Reference Creating the Terms of Reference and logo. 2. Creating a film on what life looks like through the eyes of the child in the care of Southampton Council To be shown in Love our Children week. 3. Creating an art exhibition depicting their thoughts and feelings about: What they need/want from their corporate parent. Good practice in looked after and care leaver services and what the challenges for them as children and young people are. 4. Creating a set of Commitments for both looked after and care leaver services, which need formal adoption during Love our Children week. <p>The Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum will be writing a set of local commitments they will ask the Council the sign up to. These will complement the National Pledge. Art will be used to gather the thoughts and</p>

	<p>feelings of what ‘excellent care’ looks like to them. These will officially be launched at the ‘Love Our Children’ week.</p> <p>5. Developing the Positive Relationships Awards</p> <p>Our children and young people will be nominating a special professional in their lives to receive an award from them during our ‘Love our Children’ week. Nominations will be taken from June 2021, with the Children in Care Council leading the event. More to come nearer the time</p> <p>6. Formal adoption of the Care Experienced Conference pledge</p> <p>We are launching a crafters campaign to light up Southampton Council with love! We are asking for all employees and partners of the council to get behind our campaign and help us by knitting as many hearts as possible for our giant love heart mural. This mural will form part of the opening ceremony for ‘Love our Children’ week in September and will remain lit up for the entire week. This will become an annual event, with the mural being an integral part of the celebrations.</p>
12.	<p>Robert Henderson, Executive Director attended the Children in Care Council and was given some firm messages from the children on what they liked and didn’t like about their lives. The themes that came from that meeting are:</p> <p>Overall children enjoyed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Living with their current carers • Having animals as pets <p>Overall children told us they didn’t enjoy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being moved from one home to another • Having changes of social workers often • Being placed in homes different to those of their birth families. • Contact with their families not happening often enough. <p>These messages will not come as a surprise to anyone, but we must not become complacent. The children and young people will now expect a response from the Executive Director on how he is planning to tackle these issues.</p>
	Ofsted Social Care National Consultative Forum Care leavers’ sub-group
13.	<p>We were successful in achieving a place for one of our young people on this group. We are now the second local authority with representation from a young person, with Croydon Council being the other. This group will help Ofsted’s thinking with how to engage children and young people in inspection and the priorities for Inspectors.</p>
	All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for children in and leaving care
14.	<p>We have applied to become part of the APPG and will be attending with two of our young people (the maximum number allowed) at the next event. It is a fantastic opportunity for our children and young people to experience, with</p>

	<p>the events being held in Portcullis House. We will be attending in person once the Covid restrictions have been lifted.</p> <p>(https://www.becomecharity.org.uk/improving-the-care-system/appg/)</p>
	<p>National Review of the Social Care System</p>
15.	<p>The Department for Education announced a National Review of the Social Care system in January 2021 with Josh MacAlister as the Review Chair. The first steps for the Review were a call for advice and a recruitment campaign for an Experts by Experience group which will help lead and shape the review. The IRO's took up the challenge for engagement of our young people together with Jenny Molloy, with an incredible 71 applications received by the DfE. This is an incredible achievement. Overall, there was 1100 applications, and against that cohort, one of our children was selected for interview. The panel were extremely impressed by our 11-year-old and as a result they are seeking to secure him a place on the young person's board. All 71 children and young people will have the opportunity of engaging further.</p>
	<p>Why am I in Care?</p>
16.	<p>The Brightspots survey in 2018 told us that too many of our children and young people do not understand why they are in care. This can have serious consequences on the child or young person's chances of stability in care. Further, children can struggle with a sense of belonging and safety if they are unsure of the reasons that they do not live with their birth family. Therefore, as a response to this, we are developing and implementing a supportive programme to help social workers have difficult conversations with looked after children about their 'care story' using The Narrative Model. The programme consists of 2 training workshops, drop-in surgeries for direct work discussions and webinars with the model authors.</p>
17.	<p>The programme will provide opportunities to discuss why some children may not understand why they are in care, and some of the reasons why professionals may struggle with the complex task of sharing and developing a clear care narrative for the child. This model will support professionals with a clear framework which can be used when developing the child's care story creating a clear history for the child. This is vital direct work for the child or young person's emotional wellbeing. The programme will be launched in the March practice week.</p>
	<p>Total Respect</p>
18.	<p>We are introducing the National accredited training programme, Total Respect which is designed, delivered and led by young people who have experienced the care system. The focus of the session is to positively change the way staff listen to and respond to looked after children and is relevant to all children's social care professionals, including Members and Carers. We are implementing bitesize sessions to begin with given the delivery online with the first bitesize session will be available in the Easter holidays so please keep an eye out for the dates.</p>
	<p>Service Improvement</p>
19.	<p>As part of Jenny's work with the independent reviewing officer service a small number of cases have been identified where there has been an unacceptable</p>

	delay in addressing the children's needs. This has been escalated to the Executive Director and his management team in order to secure their resolution.
20.	Jenny would like to take the opportunity to thank the Independent Reviewing Officers for their enthusiasm and engagement with all of the above projects. The team have been incredible with their efforts helping us to reach as many children and young people as possible.
RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS	
<u>Capital/Revenue</u>	
21.	N/A
<u>Property/Other</u>	
22.	N/A
LEGAL IMPLICATIONS	
<u>Statutory power to undertake proposals in the report:</u>	
23.	S.111 Local Government Act 1972
<u>Other Legal Implications:</u>	
24.	N/A
RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS	
25.	The principal risk is that looked after children and care leavers would be disadvantaged if a local authority was failing to discharge its corporate parenting duties effectively. The risk is mitigated through the local authority quality assurance process and governance via the Corporate Parenting Committee.
POLICY FRAMEWORK IMPLICATIONS	
26.	The Corporate Plan 2020 sets out the following regarding the wellbeing of children in the city: <p>“Working with partners to deliver the ambitions set out in the five-year Health and Wellbeing Strategy, this area looks at wellbeing across the city, with a focus on adults and children’s social care, education and public health. We work closely with partners to help safeguard vulnerable people across the city. We are focused on delivering strong customer experience across the Adults and Children & Families services. We want Southampton to be a city that is recognised for its proactive approach to preventing problems and intervening early, as well being a ‘Child Friendly City’ where children and young people have great opportunities and an aspiration to achieve. We want our residents to have the information and support they need to lead safe, active, healthy lives and to be able to live independently for longer.</p>

KEY DECISION?	No
WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED:	All
<u>SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION</u>	

Appendices	
1.	None

Documents In Members' Rooms

1.	None
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Equality Impact Assessment

Do the implications/subject of the report require an Equality and Safety Impact Assessment (ESIA) to be carried out?	No
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Data Protection Impact Assessment

Do the implications/subject of the report require a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) to be carried out?	No
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Other Background Documents

Other Background documents available for inspection at:

Title of Background Paper(s)	Relevant Paragraph of the Access to Information Procedure Rules / Schedule 12A allowing document to be Exempt/Confidential (if applicable)
1.	NA