

Report to Cabinet

DRAFT REPORT FOR AGREEMENT

Voice of the Child & Young Person

A Report of the Children's Social Care
& Learning Select Committee

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From the Inquiry Chairman

On behalf of the inquiry team, I would like to pass on our huge thanks and appreciation to all those people who gave up their valuable time to talk to us and allow us to gain a deeper insight into this important area of work.

The inquiry team and the wider Children's Social Care and Learning (CSCL) Select Committee are continually impressed by the dedication and professionalism shown by all those working with our children and young people.

It is only through the willingness of officers, partners and children and young people themselves to engage with the Committee that we can strive to continually improve the outcomes for our children and young people and keep them safe, and for that we are very grateful.

Dev Dhillon – Chairman – CSCL Select Committee



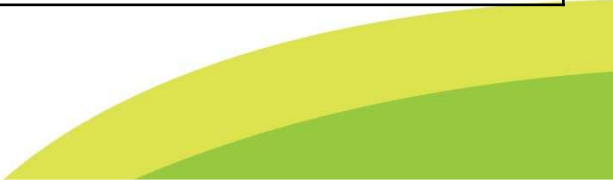
Purpose of Cabinet Report

To seek the agreement of Cabinet for the Children's Social Care & Learning Select Committee 's Voice of the Child and Young Person report and recommendations

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Inquiry Scope

Inquiry set up to:

- Consider how well Joint Commissioning (including with health (e.g. Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services & Therapies), Youth Services and Children's Social Care listen to the voice of the child and young person and the extent to which it influences the way children's services are planned, commissioned and delivered.

Not part of the scope:

- Services for children outside of the remit of CSCL Business Unit, Joint Commissioning or Youth Services.
- Service commissioned by partners for children e.g. District Council services, Bucks Learning Trust.
- Services commissioned by schools
- School placements.
- School Transport

Inquiry scope agreed at CSCL Select Committee
20th September 2016



Microsoft Word
Document



Inquiry Purpose – Benchmarking

A review of good practice from Barnardo's, National Youth Agency, Children's Commissioner, Ofsted, and other councils shows the following:

Voice of the Child and Young Person – Why Does It Matter?

- Children & young people feel listened to
- Contributes to personal development
- Part of evidence-informed practice
- Plans, decision making and outcomes are more successful
- Services can be adapted to needs early to prevent issues escalating
- Children & young people can share experiences from their point of view

What happens when children and young people are not listened to

- Children and young people are less safe
- The ability to intervene early is reduced and issues can escalate
- Incorrect assumptions can be made
- A child and young person's wellbeing is reduced
- Children & young people are less visible and adult's needs dominate
- Knowledge about children & young people is limited to their relationships with adults



Methodology

Inquiry Team



Dev Dhillon Patricia Birchley Phil Gomm Paul Irwin Val Letheren Wendy Mallen Robin Stuchbury
Chairman

How the team gathered their information and evidence

- **Desktop research**
 - Gathered evidence of good practice & gained an understanding of local, regional, national and international context. Review undertaken of plans, strategies, policies and reports.
- **Views of children and young people: 124 responses received.**
 - Online survey for all children and young people
 - Attendance at a Youth Voice event and completion of survey
 - Survey completed at a We Do Care Council meeting
 - Survey completed at a Young Carers event



Methodology

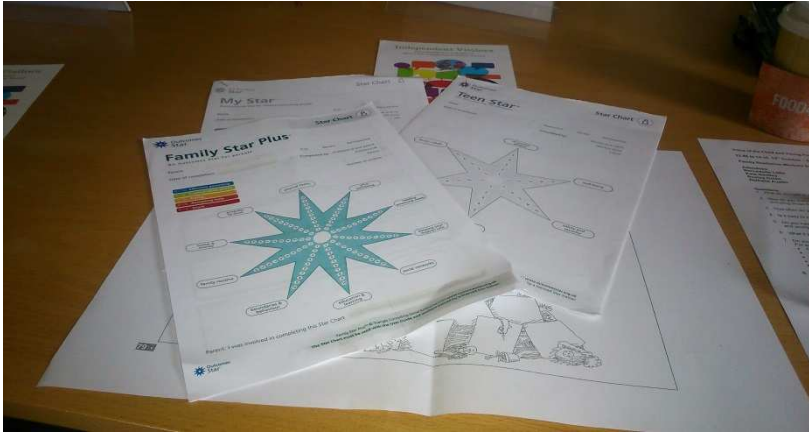
- The inquiry team held meetings during Autumn 2016 with:
 - Senior Managers
 - Youth Participation/Youth Services
 - Social Care
 - Joint Commissioning
 - Commissioners
 - Social Work Teams
 - Children in Need
 - Children with Disabilities
 - Children in Care
 - CATCH Team
 - Early Help Team
 - National Youth Advocacy Service
 - Independent Reviewing Officers
 - Barnardo's Youth Participation
 - Barnardo's RU Safe
 - Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)
 - Children's complaints team:- update/training session



Information and Evidence Gathering



The Committee learning about the range of ways that children's and young people's views are gathered



Background

National / International context



Children's Act 1989



- The UK Government is signed up to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 12 outlines the right for children to give their opinion on all matters affecting them.
- Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC) has a statutory duty set out in The Children Act 1989 to consider the wishes and feelings of children when decisions are made about them
- A judgement on how well the Council listens to and acts upon the views and experiences of children and young people is part of Ofsted's inspection framework.



Background

Local Context



Buckinghamshire County Council is committed to taking the views of children and young people into account when commissioning services. *“Involving customers and service users to ensure their views are central to commissioning services” – BCC Commissioning Framework*

The Buckinghamshire Children’s and Young People’s Partnership confirms that *“listening and acting on the voice of our children and young people is central to the planning and delivery of services in Buckinghamshire” Children and Young People’s Plan 2014-18*

BCC’s Ofsted report of August 2014, found some areas for improvement around taking the views, wishes and feelings of children and young people into account and using them to shape services.



Summary of Findings

Strengths

- ✓ Good range of ways used to listen to and gather views – tailored to specific needs.
- ✓ All staff working with children and young people clearly understand the need to gather and use views.
- ✓ Good examples of changes that have been made as a result of listening to children and young people
- ✓ Examples of children and young people being involved in the design & commissioning of services

Weaknesses

- ✗ Inconsistencies in recording and sharing of views
- ✗ Lack of specific resources for gathering views e.g. books, toys
- ✗ In some service areas the amount of time given to gather views needs to be improved and skills gaps addressed
- ✗ Children and young people don't find it easy to give their views
- ✗ The strategic approach to the Voice of the Child and Young Person needs to be strengthened .



Summary of recommendations

Recommendation	Focus
1	That sufficient tools are available to gather and listen and purchasing cards are made available
2	Increase the amount of time that some social workers have to gather children and young people's views
3	Set up a forum for disabled children
4	Improvements to the website
5	The recording and discussion of children and young people's views are strengthened
6	Ensure voice of the child and young person is included as an overarching priority in key strategies.
7	That the wider leadership team meetings have a standing agenda item on voice of the child and young person
8	Leaders identified to maintain a high profile of the voice of the child and young person strategically and in plans, projects and key strategies



THE DETAIL

GATHERING AND LISTENING TO The Views of Children and Young People

Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations



Findings and Conclusions to Support Recommendations 1-4

Gathering and Listening

Findings

In meetings with commissioners, front line staff and managers, the Committee were told about the following-

- A good use of observation, books, toys, games, pictures, drawing, Outcome Stars and the “MOMO App.” to gather views and there is a specialist team of officers working with children with disabilities.
- Commissioners work with youth services colleagues and the Youth Forum as well as with service providers to continually gather feedback.
- Although there is good interaction with disabled children individually, there is no specific participation group for children with disabilities to gain wider feedback.
- There is a lack of readily available resources for front line workers to use particularly games, books and toys. Workers sometimes use their own funds to buy these due to the length of time it takes to authorise small sums of cash to buy items if they are not available.
- Social workers have varying skill sets in this area, for example in direct work and completing life-story work. The caseloads of social workers in some areas, particularly in children in need assessments, although reducing, are still higher than the service would like which can affect the amount of time spent understanding a child or young person’s wishes and building relationships.

Findings and Conclusions to Support Recommendations 1-4

Gathering and Listening

Conclusion

Staff have a good understanding of the need to gather and listen to the needs of children and young people. There is a wide range of methods used to gather views tailored to the specific needs and ages of children and young people. However the availability of resources to do this in some areas needs to be improved and there needs to be more time available in some teams to listen to children and young people.



Findings and Conclusions to Support Recommendations 1-4

Gathering and Listening

Findings

Results from the surveys conducted with children and young people show that:

- 53% of children and young people who had given their views had found it fairly difficult to do so.
- 57% of those who told us why they hadn't given us their views said it was because they didn't know how to not because they didn't want to.
- Of those who said how they would want to give their views to the Council in future, email was the highest preference, followed by face to face and over the phone.
- 51% didn't know whether the Council would listen to their views.

In addition, some partners told the Committee that feedback about actions being taken to address wider thematic issues raised by children and young people (rather than individual case issues) could be improved.



Key Findings and Evidence to Support Recommendations 1-4

Gathering and Listening

Conclusion

Children and young people are willing to give their views and generally trust the Council to keep those views confidential if required. However, information about the way views can be given and how views have been taken into account in shaping services needs to be much more easily available.



GATHERING AND LISTENING

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

That sufficient tools are readily available for all people working with children and young people to gather and record views for example books, pictures, games and toys and that purchasing cards are made available to buy additional items quickly.

Recommendation 2

That more innovative way are introduced to increase the amount of quality time workers within social care have to gather the views of children and young people, particularly within the children in need service.



GATHERING AND LISTENING


Recommendations

Recommendation 3

That a participation group for children and young people with disabilities is established so that their collective voice can be heard and disseminated to Commissioners, Youth Service and Social Care to act upon.

Recommendation 4:

That a specific Voice of the Child and Young Person website hub is developed to :

- Publicise prominently the relevant email addresses, phone numbers and social media for children and young people to give their views.**
 - Provide links to all relevant BCC and partners' website pages that focus on and provide a way for children and young people to give their views.**
 - Let children and young people know what has happened as a result of their feedback. (You said, we did)**
 - Clearly signpost services for children and young people in a way that is easy to understand.**
 - Publicise the rights of children and young people to be heard**
- 

THE DETAIL

RECORDING

The Views of Children and Young People

Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations



Findings and Conclusions to Support Recommendation 5

Recording

Findings

Front line workers and commissioners told us that:

- Within social care the individual child or young person's views are recorded onto the ICS system but the field for recording this is not mandatory to complete and so information is not always available to all staff as quickly as it could be.
- Social care managers hold supervision meetings with staff to discuss individual cases and a template document is used so that the relevant discussion points are discussed, however the part of the template related to the views of children and young people is not mandatory to be discussed or completed.
- Views of children and young people gathered by Commissioners are recorded either on the Contract Management System, retained by service providers or held by Commissioners themselves.



Findings and Conclusions to Support Recommendation 5 **Recording**

Conclusion

There is good awareness of the importance of recording the views and feelings of children and young people so that all those involved in their care have access to relevant information. However, there is some inconsistency in the way views are recorded and discussed and because there are a number of places for recording information it is not possible to get a strategic view of themes and analysis across the Business Unit.



Recommendation 5

That the recording and discussion of children and young people's views are strengthened by:

- Work with staff across each business area to draw up a good practice guidance document on the process of recording and discussing the views of children and young people to improve consistency.
- Making discussion at social care supervision meetings & recording on the supervision template of children's and young people's views obligatory.
- Investigating whether the field within the ICS system to record the views of children and young people can be made mandatory to complete.
- As part of the Business Unit's work on Business Intelligence, look to set up a data hub in which all views gathered and recorded, from whichever service, can be stored, accessed and analysed from one place by multiple users.



THE DETAIL

USING

The Views of Children and Young People

Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations



Findings and Conclusion to Support Recommendation 6,7 and 8

Using

Findings.

Commissioners, partners, front line staff and managers told us about changes to provision and service design as a result of listening to children and young people, this included changes to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), care plans, and quality of accommodation. The welcome pack given to those coming into care was designed and written by looked after children.

The Committee heard from managers, commissioners and front line staff that there is some cross-functional working, for example social workers working across teams and officers working with staff in Children's Centres, however the various functions within the business units still tend to work separately to act upon the views of children and young people and don't always share findings. In addition workload pressures particularly in children in need and reductions in budgets in Youth Services and Commissioning are starting to affect the amount of work that the Council is able to undertake in this area.



Key Findings and Evidence to Support Recommendation 6 and 7 **Using**

Conclusion

There are some good examples of where views have been used to change service provision and design and partners recognise the good work the Council undertakes in this area. However, the strategic approach to using children and young people's views needs to be strengthened to maximise opportunities to analyse the many views recorded to identify gaps in service provision, be able to shape services accordingly and consider budget and resource allocations in this area in a more holistic way.



Recommendation 6

To strengthen the strategic approach:

- a) Ensure that the voice of the child and young person is an overarching priority within Business Unit strategies, for example the Children's Strategy and its associated implementation plan, to include specific actions and performance measures.**
- b) Make sure children and young people are part of the recruitment panel for appointments supporting children and young people**



Recommendation 7

That at each meeting of the wider leadership team there is a standing agenda item on the voice of the child and young person to focus on:

Ensuring the voice of the child and young person is included in key strategies and plans

Understanding the themes and lessons that can be learned from analysing the views of children and young people from across the different service areas.

Using analysis of children and young people's views to identify gaps and duplication in service provision and ensure effective and efficient use of resources.

Feeding back on key issues to the Senior Management Team meeting and Business Unit Board.

And that once a year, a wider leadership team meeting is devoted to the voice of the child and young person.



Recommendation 8

That Voice of the Child and Young Person Leaders in the CSCL Business Unit and throughout the organisation are identified and whose role is to maintain a high profile for this area of work, share good practice and ensure that the voice of the child and young person becomes a more detailed cross cutting theme in strategies, plans and projects.



Other Findings


There are no specific recommendations to be made around the following and not all were directly in scope. However during its evidence gathering, the Inquiry Team identified the following as issues for the Children's Services and Education and Skills portfolios linked to the Voice of the Child and Young Person and so are keen to highlight them. The Committee will use the findings to inform potential future Committee work items.

Children's Centres

The review of family support services should recognise the high importance placed on Children's Centres, including universal services, in ensuring the views of children and young people are gathered and listened to at an early stage and the contribution that this makes to preventing an escalation to more intensive social care services

Budget reductions in Youth Service

Understand the impact that current reductions in spending in Youth Services has had in allowing the Council to hear the views of those children not currently receiving a social care service. Explore whether any issues identified can be addressed in any service reviews or in impact assessments at budget planning.



Other Findings

Children Placed Out Of County

It is more difficult to get the views of some children and young people placed out of County due to the length of time taken to travel to visit, this is particularly the case with resources available for life story work.

School engagement

Identify good practice in engaging with schools across the County in helping gather the views of children and young people. Good practice identified should be shared to improve engagement across all schools in helping gather the views of children and young people.

Unaccompanied asylum seeking children

Build on the current work undertaken to listen to unaccompanied children and who the service are already working with to ensure timely access to good interpreters and mental health services tailored to the specific needs of young unaccompanied asylum seekers who are coming new into the service.

