

Children & Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 29 September 2020

Children & Young People's Participation Update

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 The Committee note the positive contributions that children and young people (C&YP) have made towards the progress of the Participation and Engagement Strategy 2019-2023.
- 1.2 The Committee consider a cross party group to give impetus to specific priorities raised by C&YP that require more traction.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Committee received a report on 15th January 2019 resulting in the adoption of the Children and Young People's Participation and Engagement Strategy 2019-2023.
- 2.2 The Committee received a report on 12th March 2019 providing an overview and update on the Participation and Engagement of C&YP.
- 2.3 The Committee had requested annual updates on the progress of the Children and Young People's Participation and Engagement Strategy.
- 2.4 This report was originally intended to go to the Committee on 28th April 2020, however, the Committee meeting was cancelled as a result of the public health crisis and lockdown.
- 2.5 This update covers the period April 2019 to March 2020.
- 2.6 The report also considers the implications of Covid-19 on the progress on the Participation and Engagement Strategy from March to September 2020.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 There are no significant financial implications to consider at this stage.

4. Environmental Implications

4.1 There are no significant environmental implications to consider at this stage.

5. Supporting Information

5.1 The Participation and Engagement Strategy is primarily concerned with **young people's priorities** listed on page 7 of the strategy.

5.2 The work of the Targeted Youth Support and Participation Team.

- a. **Targeted Youth Support.** Over the last year, there have been changes as to how the universal voice of C&YP is listened to. C&YP raise areas of interest to them via the Warwick Youth Council and Youth Forums, which have replaced the previous arrangement of Local Youth Councils and Members of Youth Parliament. **Appendix 1** offers some examples on the work of the Warwickshire Youth Council and Youth Forums from 2019-2020.
- a. **Participation Team.** Over the last year, there has been a marked increase in the number of care experienced young people and young people seeking asylum taking part in participation events and activities. **Appendix 2** provides an outline of the key areas of work from 2019-2020. This programme of work has improved communication with young people and improved the numbers of young people engaging with the service. The Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum have played a significant role in helping to shape the work in the examples listed in the appendix.
- b. The **Children and Families Service** has undertaken a programme of *Restorative Practice Training*. The main purpose behind this training is to support those people using Children and Families services to work at finding their own solutions, as opposed to having solutions provided or imposed onto them. This is a significant cultural change and is participatory in both approach and nature. The restorative training programme and reinforcement of learning is ongoing.

5.3 5 Children and Young People Priorities Areas (page 7 of the strategy)

Councillor Colin Hayfield hosted a series of 3 meetings with C&YP, senior officers from Children & Families, Commissioning and Education over 2019 and early 2020. The aim of these meetings was to give momentum to the priorities identified by C&YP. The priorities areas are 'Keep Healthy', 'Be Safe', 'Have Fun & Do Well', 'Take Part' and 'Think About Your Future'.

a. **Keep Healthy**

C&YP had highlighted the need for better 'access', 'information' and 'support' from emotional wellbeing and mental health services. An update from Commissioning Services on Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Services for young people is attached as **Appendix 3**. This also includes the Commissioning Service Business Continuity. The Business Continuity Plan illustrates services available to C&YP during the public health crisis.

In addition, care experienced young people have access to services to support their emotional wellbeing and health via the **Care Leavers Offer**. Some examples include access to the gym, access to a mentor, access to staying healthy and wellbeing workshops, etc.

Care experienced young people had also identified "regular communication with people important to (them)" as a priority. Currently, due to the public health crisis, any **Family Time** takes place via online communication. The Children and Families service is gradually re-introducing face-to-face **Family Time** that is risk assessed to ensure the safety of all those involved. In the future, there is good potential to explore both virtual and face-to-face Family Time meetings as an option to improve regular communication.

As part of their work, the Warwickshire Youth Council have contributed to the JSNA to help establish the health and social needs of the Warwickshire youth population. An officer from Public Health and strategic commissioning met with the Warwickshire Youth Council to explore the health and wellbeing needs of young people in Warwickshire.

C&YP had equally prioritised an "increase (in) funding and support for young carers". The Warwickshire Young Carers contract has a value of £130,000 per annum for 3 years. The contract ends Sept 2022. There is also an IBCF (Improved Better Care Fund) winter fund of £10K to support young carers this year.

b. Be safe

An update from Education on C&YP’s need to “feel safe (especially online) and in schools”, “be supported by someone we trust” and be given “support to deal with difficult situations” is in the table below.

| Outcomes | Themes | Children & Young People’s Priorities |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|--|
| Be Safe | Bullying/Peer Pressure | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We want to feel safe (especially online) and in schools • We want to be supported by someone we trust • We want support to deal with difficult situations <p>Online safeguarding has been a priority of WCC’s safeguarding support to schools and has taken on even greater importance with so many Children and Young People studying online at home due to the coronavirus lockdown. It is a standing item for the Warwickshire Safe Partnership board with representatives from several of WCC’s partners including the police. Safeguarding training sessions and events held with schools have also included lessons to learn on e-safety.</p> <p>Over the past few months, WCC’s safeguarding support has been reorganised to increase our impact in this area. Investment will now come from multiple units across the council to provide a broader offer of support for all educational settings, children and families.</p> <p>This support will continue to feature training sessions on e-safety as part of the wider safeguarding training and support which we hope will facilitate a supportive and safe learning environment for Children and Young People.</p> |

c. Have Fun and Do Well

C&YP indicated that they would like to see more “long term worthwhile jobs”, better “information about alternative routes into jobs”, and “more support into further education” for those who have been excluded or have disabilities. An update is attached in the table below from Education.

| Outcomes | Themes | Children & Young People’s Priorities |
|----------------------|------------------------------|--|
| Have Fun and Do Well | Education and Qualifications | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need more support into employment that moves us into long term worthwhile jobs • We need more support into further education. For example: for children & young people with disabilities: help finding new schools after exclusion or moving, sixth form, colleges and universities • We need more information about alternative routes into jobs, rather than the usual ones like college and university <p>One of the four key priorities of the Warwickshire Education Strategy is to champion employability. This priority has its own detailed work programme, the Warwickshire Careers Strategy, which outlines five key action areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Raising the awareness of the range of career and employment opportunities locally, inspiring residents of all ages to develop their education and skills as far as possible 2. Building the capacity of our education providers to deliver effective and sustainable careers support and advice 3. Providing targeted support and help to our most vulnerable learners 4. Improving alignment of demand and supply of skills, now and in the future 5. Encouraging and enabling businesses to recruit from a richer and wider talent pool <p>Some key projects ongoing in this area:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arranging Supported Internships for children with an EHC Plan providing better experience of and opportunities for paid employment post-education for our learners with high needs. As of May 2020 there were 56 supported interns in Warwickshire. The ambition is to increase the number annually. • Warwickshire Careers Hub established and integrated with WCC’s Skills for Employment programme which will give schools and colleges in the hub access to further support and funding • Apprenticeship promotion – a series of events have been hosted by WCC promoting apprenticeship opportunities • Supported 6,000 pupils with the Digital School House project that provides a creative, digital careers education in a series of events across Warwickshire. • An ongoing project is to deliver the ‘My World of Work’ project to raise awareness of careers and employment opportunities in the county’s priority sectors • Establish the Youth Employment Platform to operate as an |

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| | | <p>Advisory Group to the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) to create a youth friendly West Midlands</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer of work experience opportunities at Warwickshire County Council • Developing Careers Leaders in schools and colleges is a key priority of our Skills for Employment programme <p>For information on your post-16 options and opportunities, please visit https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/post-16-college-education</p> |
| | <p>Wider Curriculum</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need a wide-ranging curriculum that teaches us important life skills so that we can be as independent as an adult. For example: sustainable living, taxes, political education, education on laws, sex education and health <p>Curriculum development was highlighted in the Warwickshire Education Strategy Review 2019 as one of three key areas in the strategy that needed greater attention.</p> <p>In the refreshed Education Strategy that followed, to be launched in September 2020, curriculum development will be a key workstream for the Warwickshire Family of Schools priority with the Education Challenge Board responsible for overseeing this programme of work.</p> <p>Following the partial closure of schools during the pandemic, what we teach and how we deliver it has taken on even more importance. Hence, we will be focusing both upon ways to promote greater breadth and the different tools that we can use to communicate with. The events of recent months have raised school’s awareness of virtual learning and we want to consider how the lessons learnt can be incorporated into our continuing work.</p> <p>We also want to ensure that the wide range of different curriculum materials developed by schools during this period continue to be used going forward. We want to promote flexibility and breadth so that we can equip all Warwickshire students with the skills that they need for adult life.</p> |

Furthermore, care experienced young people have access to services via the **Care Leavers Offer**. This includes ring-fenced apprenticeship opportunities, driving lessons, access to Drop-Ins to support with seeking employment, support with Universal Credit applications, access to grants supporting education and learning via Baradell/Tiffin/EET funds, an offer additional tutoring for Maths and English, access to a Careers Advisor, etc.

The Warwickshire Youth Council are in communication with an officer in Warwickshire Education Services to develop a better understanding of the Warwickshire Education Strategy Annual Review 2020. The C&YP’s “Have Your Say Survey”, has highlighted that “work experience and careers advice” is still very important to young people in Warwickshire.

d. **Take Part.**

C&YP felt they “need to be better prepared for adulthood”. An update is attached in the table below from Education.

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| <p>Take Part</p> | <p>Life Skills</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need to be better prepared for adulthood and adult life <p>The main aim of the Warwickshire Education Strategy is to improve educational outcomes, and therefore the life chances, of learners of all ages in Warwickshire.</p> <p>We believe that preparation for adulthood starts in the Early Years and continues throughout school life starting with a high-quality and diverse education in a safe learning environment that empowers children and young people to grow.</p> <p>Through, the education strategy, we will continue to work with schools, other education providers and our partners so that children and young people in Warwickshire feel better prepared for adulthood and adult life.</p> |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|--|

Care experienced young people were keen to be better prepared for independent living by being, “shown and trained how to cook, clean, wash, shop, manage money, etc”. Warwickshire have commissioned Doorway to provide accredited independence training for young people.

Currently, alternative options are being explored via the Warwickshire House Project to consider introducing an online programme of learning accessed via the National House Project.

Care experienced young people can access additional services via the **Care Leavers Offer**. This includes mentoring to support the journey toward independence, council tax reimbursements, a home furnishing grant, access to a ‘pop-up shop’ set up by care experienced young people, etc. There is also an increased focus on supporting foster carers through training to nurture improved independence skills with care experienced young people.

Equality, respect, listening, and promoting positive stories, featured as priorities for C&YP. There are ongoing opportunities for C&YP to raise issues on ‘equality and respect’, and for C&YP to be heard at the most senior levels of the organisation. The positive participation and engagement of C&YP is shared more widely through staff blogs, internal online newsletters, videos and local media (**See Appendix 1 & 2**).

The Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum have had regular dialogue with officers of the Council on specific subject areas, with a view to improving the experience of those C&YP who come into the care of Warwickshire. **Appendix 2** provides some examples of where care experienced young people have shaped service design and delivery.

There has been very little progress on young people's priority on giving "16 and 17-year olds the right to vote in elections and referendums". The scope of Warwickshire to make this decision is limited. Continued support for young people to pursue this campaign is ongoing and a continued option. Nonetheless, the Warwickshire Youth Council has gathered views of Warwickshire young people on voting at 16 and raised awareness through a presentation shared with secondary schools.

The **Stratford** youth forum have launched a film project to encourage young people to share their views about where they live.

The **Rugby** youth forum has had lots of political focus on Brexit and the 2019 General Election. As a result, 3 young people have joined different political parties.

The **Nuneaton and Bedworth** youth forum have carried out surveys to ascertain issues important to C&YP. The forum met with Marcus Jones MP, to update him on their county campaigns. Members of the forum have started volunteering with voluntary youth agencies, using their skills and knowledge to make sure the voice of young people is heard.

The **Warwick** youth forum completed a public survey on attitudes to knife crime. They held discussions about Brexit and completed a survey with Warwick University on this issue. Young people also voiced their concerns about cuts in bus services to their local Councillor and were pleased with the results, as their school bus service remains unchanged.

The **North Warwickshire** youth forum held a successful Q&A session with their local MP, Craig Tracy. Mr. Tracy was quizzed on issues such as the removal of politics from school teaching, curriculum for life, racial abuse, Brexit, teenage pregnancy, knife crime, and male suicide. The forum also did some volunteer work with a local organisation called RISE, by helping at an open event and encouraging more young people to access the service. The forum decided that they wanted to learn more about male suicide, so they invited a guest speaker from RISE to learn about how they could help others, they then filtered this information back to a local school within their area.

e. Think About Your Future

Young people have campaigned to introduce the national “Living Wage”. There has been no progress or change in respect to this priority.

Young people have campaigned over several years to “make public transport cheaper, better and accessible”. Despite having held many discussions with elected members and officers over the years, there has been no agreed way forward.

C&YP people have also taken part in a survey to highlight concerns they have around their future. The survey has highlighted that young people are concerned about the environment, services for young people and their safety. These are new emerging priorities.

5.4 Emerging Priorities for Children and Young People

A survey carried out with young people in Jan/Feb 2020 received 1374 responses from young people. The emerging issues were as follows:

- a. **Environment** – Reducing plastic waste, pollution and endangered species
- b. **Safety** – Support for mental health, tackling knife crime and anti-bullying
- c. **Services for young people** – More careers advice and work experience, tackling youth homelessness, and curriculum for life.

Safety and Services for C&YP have been repeat themes that have appeared annually in surveys with C&YP over several years. Environment is a growing area of concern for C&YP.

5.5 The Impact of Covid-19.

The public health crisis has had an impact on the momentum of direct work with C&YP. The very nature of participation and engagement necessitates a degree of direct work with C&YP.

Fortunately, for Warwickshire, the roll out of new technologies, such as the Surface Pro and Microsoft Teams, has allowed for newer ways of working to be considered and implemented.

Some examples of how work has been adapted to enable ongoing participation and engagement work with C&YP is as follows:

- a. Food parcels delivered to young people most in need
- b. Baby gift boxes for new care experienced young parents
- c. Completion of a 20-minute training film for professionals, foster carers, and elected members, on the experiences of young people seeking asylum when they first arrive in the UK
- d. Roll out of laptops to care experienced young people to enable ongoing communications
- e. TikTok videos by staff and young people

- f. Video messages about Covid-19 and support for mental health/wellbeing by young people for young people
- g. Online quizzes, cooking classes, bingo, Netflix film reviews by young people
- h. Young people taking part in online WCC interview panels
- i. Young people participating in online national and regional conferences,
- j. Online music club
- k. Online Warwick Youth Council meetings
- l. Online Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum meetings
- m. Allotment Project
- n. Online mentoring scheme for care experienced young people
- o. Development of an improved feedback survey
- p. Online summer activities programme
- q. An online peer to peer mentoring programme for young people

5.6 There has been a significant learning curve for both professionals and C&YP on learning new skills within the scope of existing and emerging computer technology.

5.7 One distinct positive is that there has been an increase in C&YP engaging with online activities from those who previously did not or could not participate. The downside is that some C&YP do not feel comfortable with online activities. There are C&YP that still prefer face-to-face contact. There is also some evidence of C&YP feeling increased levels of anxiety and worry as a result of longer periods of isolation and loneliness. Care experienced young people are more susceptible to feeling vulnerable at this time.

5.8 There is good potential in the future to operate a combination of both online and face-to-face activities with C&YP.

5.9 As restrictions ease there may be more opportunity to work with C&YP on a 1:1 face-to-face basis, following Government guidance and appropriate risk assessments. This situation is gradually being updated and requires ongoing monitoring.

6. Timescales associated with the decision and next steps

6.1 That the Committee consider a cross-party group to consider the three areas that have not progressed - voting for 16/17-year olds, living wage and public transport.

6.2 That the Committee acknowledge the Emerging Priorities for C&YP and absorb them, as part of the Participation and Engagement strategy.

6.3 That the work associated with the Participation Strategy features as part of the recovery plan for Warwickshire, in line with County Council advice and guidance.

Appendices

1. Targeted Youth Support Work Programme Examples
2. Children & Families Participation Annual Report 2019-2020
3. Emotional Wellbeing & Mental Health services for young people updated July & Emotional Wellbeing & Mental Health Business Continuity Plan

Supporting Documents

1. Children & Young People's Participation & Engagement Strategy 2019-2023
2. Children & Young People's Participation & Engagement Strategy 2019-2023, Children & Young People's Scrutiny Committee 15th January 2019
3. Children & young People's Presentation on Participation, Children & Young People's Scrutiny Committee 12th March 2019

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