



Report to CYP & FS Scrutiny & Policy Development Committee 14 March 2016

Report of: Jayne Ludlam, Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families.

Subject: Independent Advocacy Service, Children in Care Council and Independent Visitor Service

Author of Report: Clare Humberstone, Children's Involvement Team Manager.

Summary: Annual report of the Independent Advocacy Service, Children in Care Council and Independent Visitor Service.

Type of item: The report author should tick the appropriate box

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| Reviewing of existing policy | |
| Informing the development of new policy | |
| Statutory consultation | |
| Performance / budget monitoring report | |
| Cabinet request for scrutiny | |
| Full Council request for scrutiny | |
| Community Assembly request for scrutiny | |
| Call-in of Cabinet decision | |
| Briefing paper for the Scrutiny Committee | x |
| Other | |

The Scrutiny Committee is being asked to: Note the report and its contents.

Background Papers:

List any background documents (e.g. research studies, reports) used to write the report. Remember that by listing documents people could request a copy.

Category of Report: OPEN

Report of the Director of Jayne Ludlam, Executive Director, Children, Young People and Families

Sheffield City Council, Children's Involvement Team

1. Introduction

Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that, "all children and young people have a right to a say in any matter affecting them and for their view to be taken seriously".

Within Social Care, statutory guidance states that all children should be involved in individual decisions about their own care plans and also in influencing service design, delivery and evaluation. This duty to consider the wishes and feelings of children in care is highlighted as a priority throughout recent legislation. The Children's Act (1989 and 2004) states that:

"before making any decision with respect to a child whom the local authority are looking after or proposing to look after, the authority must, so far as reasonably practicable, ascertain the wishes and feelings of the child"

It continues by stating that:

"in making any decision in relation to the child, it [the local authority] should give due consideration to those wishes and feelings, having regard to the child's age and understanding...children should feel that they are active participants and engaged in the process when adults are trying to solve problems and make decisions about them.

The Children's Act continues by stating that:

"Where a child has difficulty in expressing his/her wishes and feelings about any decisions being made about him/her, consideration must be given to securing the support of an advocate".

This report will highlight the work that has been done by the Children's involvement Team under this agenda in the year 2015-16.

2. Sheffield Children's Involvement Team

The Children's Involvement Team in Sheffield consists of one manager and 2.5 officers and has worked since 2001 to promote the voice of children and young people in Sheffield in decision making processes. Since 2008 the work of the

team has focussed on Social Care and the independent voice of children in social care contexts.

The team's work includes:

- Commissioned consultations with children using engaging techniques.
- Developing creative tools and techniques for direct work with children. These resources are sold across the country to other local authorities.
- Delivering training to those in Sheffield working with children to give them the tools, skills and knowledge to carry out effective direct work. The team also delivers this training nationally and internationally.
- Providing advocacy for children aged 5 to 17 years for children in initial child protection conferences.
- Providing independent issue-based advocacy for all children in and leaving care.
- Facilitating the Children in Care Council.
- Managing the Independent Visitor Service.

For the purposes of this report, the work highlighted will focus on:

- The Children in Care Council
- Independent advocacy for children in care and care leavers
- Independent Visitor Service.

3. Children in Care Council

In April 2015, the Children's Involvement Team took over the contract to facilitate the Children in Care Council (CiCC). At the time that the Children's Involvement Team took over the group there were three existing members who decided that they no longer wished to be part of the CiCC. One member has since moved to the Care Leavers' Council. The focus during 2015-6 has been to recruit to and establish a new group, write a work programme and consider the best approach to link with Corporate Parenting Board.

The key achievements of the CiCC during 2015-16 are:

- The group have 8 members who meet every fortnight for 2 hours.
- 20 young people have expressed an interest in becoming a member of CiCC and have received a visit from the CiCC coordinator.
- The group have established an identity and have commissioned branded products to promote the group to other children and young people in care in the city.
- The group have written a programme of work based on the findings of the 2014 Tell Us What You Think survey and their own experiences of being in care.

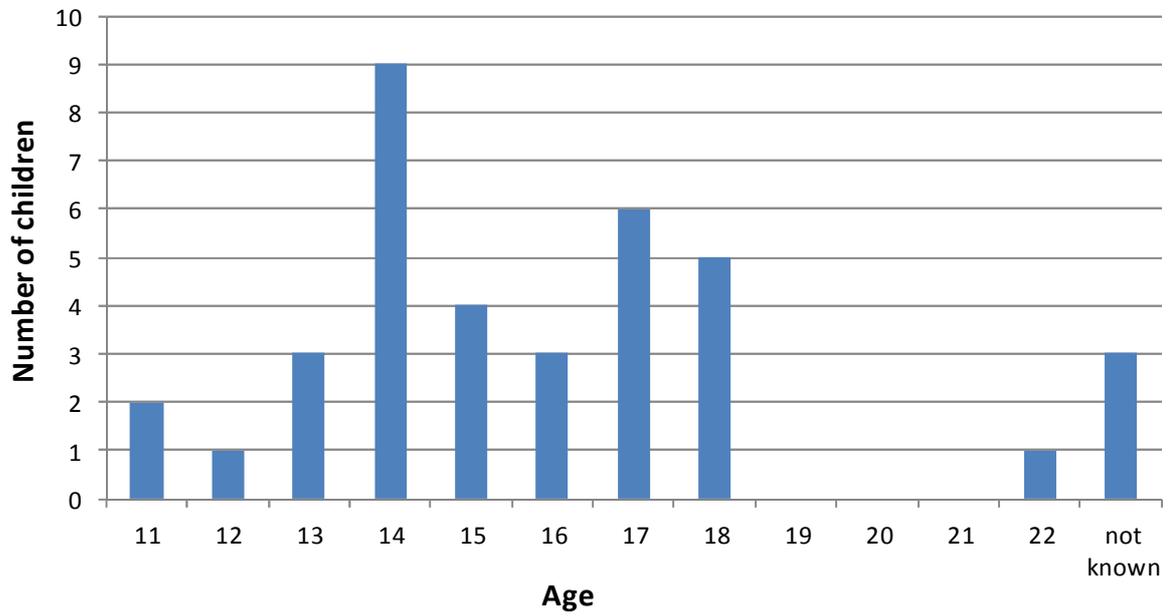
- The group have published their first newsletter which will be distributed in March 2016 with the Tell Us What You Think survey to all Sheffield's young people in care over 13 years of age.
- The group have started work on a website to tell other young people in care what they are doing and as a platform for them to gather the views of others who do not wish to be part of the group but wish to have their say about the topics the CiCC are working on.
- The CiCC facilitator sits on Corporate Parenting Board as a link between the two groups.
- The group have worked hard on their first focus area of 'relationships with social workers'. They have:
 - Produced a personal profile booklet for Social Workers (SWs) to complete and give to young people in their initial visit. This is being trialled in one team in Permanence & Throughcare with a view to rolling it out to all SWs.
 - Been involved in delivering training to SWs in the city.
 - Made a film of their experiences of relationships with social workers during their time in care to be embedded into training programmes in Sheffield for SWs.
 - Planned a 'Let's Talk About Social Workers' session for a reduced Corporate Parenting Board session.
- The group planned age-appropriate activities and attended the annual Bag A Book event to consult with younger children in care and fed their views into the work they are doing on 'relationships with Social Workers'.
- Members of the group have visited a national celebration event in London to showcase the work they have been doing.
- CiCC coordinators have attended training to support the CiCC members through an ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network) peer tutoring short course.

4. Advocacy for children in care and care leavers

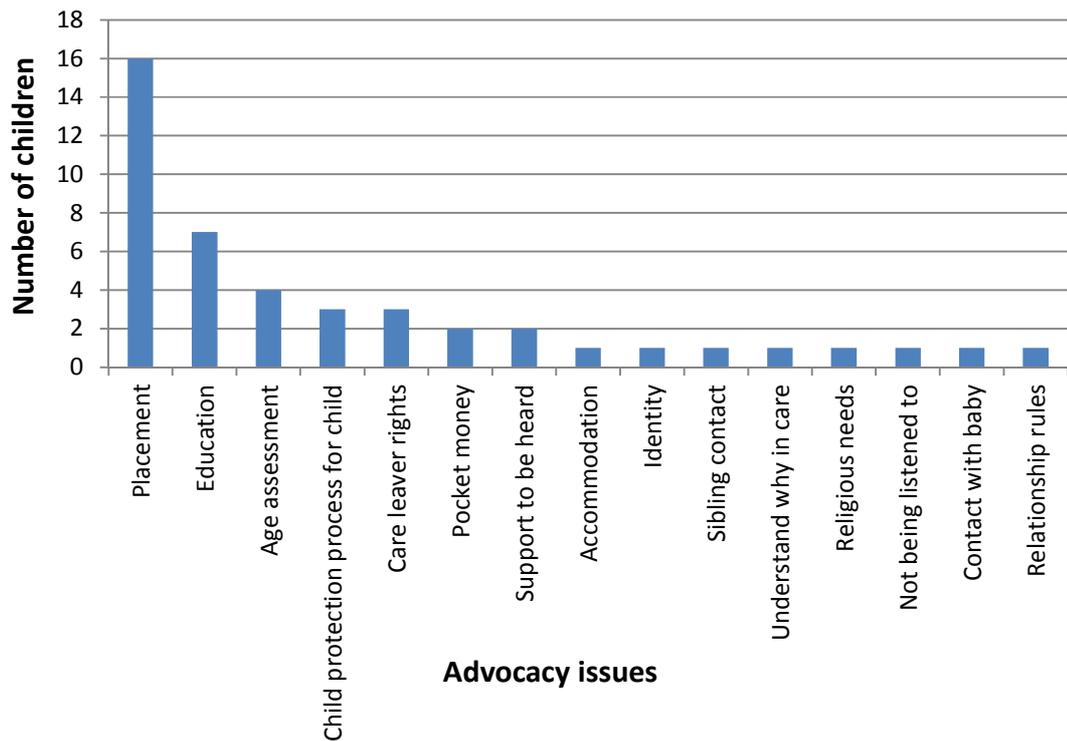
In April 2015, the Children's Involvement Team took over the contract to deliver independent issue-based advocacy for children and young people in and leaving care. During 2015-16 a total of 37 children and young people, 22 female and 15 male, have received advocacy support.

The details of these cases are as follows:

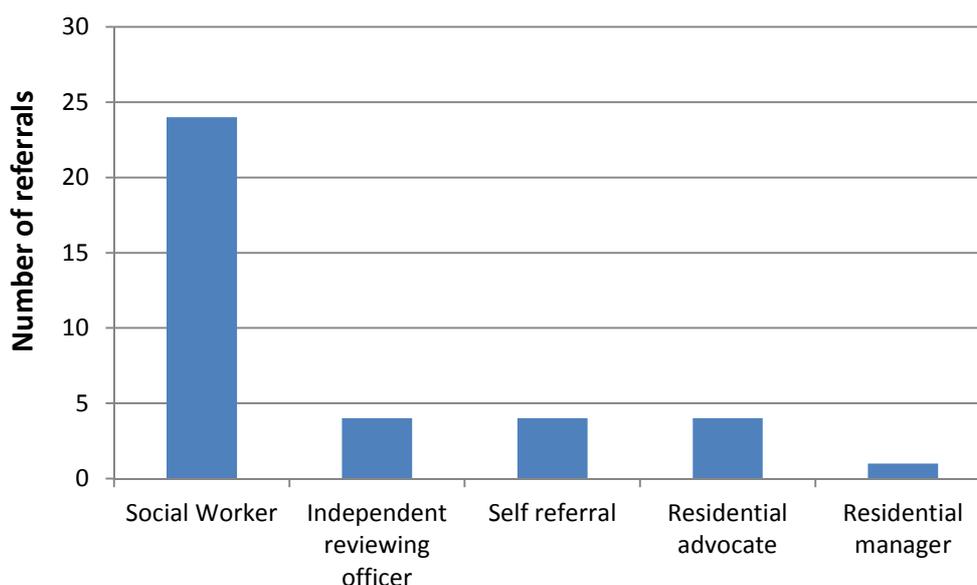
Age of children



Advocacy issues



Referral routes



During 2015-16, other activity has included:

- Establishing branding for the advocacy service
- Promoting the advocacy service widely, including regular flyers and posters sent to social workers, support workers, foster carers, schools and out of city providers.
- Informing professionals and others about what the advocacy service will (and won't) provide
- Each children's home in the city has been allocated a named advocate who has visited regularly throughout the year since September 2015. As a result of this, the number of referrals received from young people in children's homes through their named advocate and through residential workers has increased.

Feedback received from young people about the independent advocacy service has been very positive:

"Good, [my advocate] listens to me more than anyone else"

"[Your advocate] listens to you and what you say and then things get sorted. It would have been harder if I was on my own, I would not have known how to complain"

"[My advocate] helped me more than anyone. They listen to you even more than your family does and understand where you're coming from"

"It has been good and given me ideas on how to address issues I have"

“I think I needed [an advocate] because I wasn’t able to feel confident to say what I needed and I wasn’t able to show that in a way that I or anyone else could understand. Having an advocate has helped me with that”

“I feel comfortable with my advocate and that they have helped me with issues I have in a way I am very happy with”

“I loved it! When I felt like my social worker wasn’t listening she stepped in and made sure she was. Things got done a lot quicker with [my advocate]. She also helped me to understand my rights. My social worker wasn’t telling me anything but when [my advocate] stepped in I found out a lot”

“[My advocate] was an absolute life saver for me”

“[My advocate] is at the top of the scale. She was great!”

5. Independent Visitor Scheme

All children in care have a statutory right to an Independent Visitor (IV) if it is considered to be in their best interests (Children’s Act, 2004). An IV is an adult volunteer who is matched with a child in care and takes a befriending role to participate in fun activities of the child’s choice. In Sheffield, an IV must be over 21 years of age and commit to taking the young person out on an activity once a month for a minimum of two years.

In April 2015, the Children’s Involvement Team (CIT) took over the contract to deliver the IV service for children in care. At the time that CIT took over the group there were 12 existing matches between young people and IVs and 22 young people waiting to be matched.

Over the course of the year, other activity has included:

- Retaining the existing matches and transferring them to Sheffield City Council’s policies and procedures
- Provided ongoing support to the volunteers, including additional training sessions
- Advertising across the city for new volunteers. This has included Voluntary Action Sheffield, Sheffield University, School Point and distributing posters across the city.

As at 1st March 2016, the situation is as follows:

- 16 matches between young people and IVs.
- The matched young people are aged between 11 and 17 years.
- 3 matched young people live out of city.
- Matched IVs are aged from 21 to 54 years.
- 5 out of the 16 Independent Visitors are male and 11 are female.

All new volunteers are required to submit an application, attend two days of training delivered by Children’s Involvement Team, successfully complete an

online safeguarding certificate awarded by the Sheffield Safeguarding Children Board, attend training delivered by the Sheffield Child Sexual Exploitation Service and undergo a DBS check. Following successful completion of these aspects, they are then required to attend an interview, the panel for which includes a young person who is in care and currently has an IV.

There have been two rounds of recruitment this year. In November 2015, five volunteers successfully completed the full recruitment process and are currently in the process of being matched with young people. In February 2016, 13 volunteers attended two days of training and are currently part way through the process. Once they have completed the full process, they will be ready to be matched from April 2016 onwards.

There are currently 15 young people waiting to be matched with an IV:

- All are aged between 9 and 17 years old; the average age is 15 years.
- Four young people are out of city.

One requires a Pashto speaking IV.

6. What does this mean for the people of Sheffield?

It is important that Sheffield's children in and leaving care have a voice, both at an individual, personal level and in order to influence service development and delivery. Through the Children in Care Council, the independent advocacy service and the independent visitor scheme, children in and leaving care in Sheffield are able to access different structures, independent from Social Care, to make their voices heard.

7. Recommendation

The Committee are being asked to note the report and its contents.