

CORPORATE PARENTING ADVISORY COMMITTEE

19 OCTOBER 2021

**CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER AND CARE LEAVERS PARTICIPATION –
PRIORITY 3 CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY**

Reasons for the Report

1. This report has been prepared to provide the committee with an update on the Bright Sparks Club. Bright Sparks is the primary participation mechanism for Cardiff Children Looked After and Care Leavers. This update will inform the committee of the activities that Bright Sparks has undertaken in relation to the third of the 5 Priorities outlined in the Corporate Parenting Strategy – A comfortable, safe and stable home whilst in care and after. It will also include other activities in which the group has participated.

Background

2. National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) is a UK charity offering information, advice, advocacy and legal representation to the most vulnerable children, young people and adults. The core work undertaken by NYAS is an advocacy service for care experienced children and young people. NYAS are commissioned by Cardiff Children's Services to deliver a participation service to children and young people aged 11-25 who are receiving care and support from them, with the principle objective of ensuring that Children and Young People (CYP) are afforded a voice and are active participants in shaping policy and service provision within the council and within a wider external context.
3. In addition, Bright Sparks is a peer support forum for care experienced children and young people, providing them with opportunities to take part in social activities, other participation opportunities and avenues of support. The NYAS Cymru Participation Officer facilitates fortnightly group sessions which have been online since the Covid 19 pandemic. Previously meetings were held at children's services offices, with social activities taking place in the community at venues accessible to children and young people.

Issues

**Priority 3 – A comfortable, safe and stable home whilst in care and after -
The following work has taken place in relation to this priority.**

4. Bright Sparks members were asked about their initial thoughts on a piece of work being undertaken by the All Wales National Steering Group on a children's rights approach to policing. One of the objectives of the group is to ensure that all care experienced children and young people have a right to access a "Return Interview or Debrief" when they go missing. This is a statutory requirement in England but not in Wales where some Local Authorities have this in place and others do not. Bright Sparks were asked to look at the effectiveness of the use of language and the term Return Interview/Debrief. They were also asked what they would want from a return interview.
5. The majority felt that the terms Return Interview/Debrief were considered to be too formal and not young person friendly, in particular "debrief" was a term that the majority were unfamiliar with and felt sounded more relevant to police operations or to a medical setting. It was felt that these terms did not sound like they are related to CYP being missing. Alternative names were discussed such as "a talk", "returning home chat", "misper follow-up", "check-In" and "wellbeing check-in".
6. All of the young people felt that this service is very important for Looked After CYP and that this service, delivered by independent professionals, should be statutory in Wales as it is in England.
7. The Steering Group has put in an application to the Joseph Rountree Foundation to undertake more research specifically aimed at children who have gone missing from care to gather further feedback on CYP's thoughts on return interviews. The Participation Officer is looking forward to working with Cardiff Local Authority to take the next steps once funding has been secured.
8. Bright Sparks members fed into the NYAS Cymru campaign which focused on children's belongings and moving home - My Things Matter. This campaign has emerged from feedback from children and young people as well as the experiences of staff and volunteers when children are moving home. To shape the campaign, a series of three surveys were launched aimed at those 11-25, under 11's and a survey for professionals.
9. The findings of the survey have been presented to the NYAS Campaigns and Advisory Group and a report is being written which will include a ten-point moving checklist for Local Authorities. They will be asked to sign up and pledge to children and young people that they won't move their belongings in binbags, help them find lost and damaged belongings, support them through the moving process, etc. The My Things Matter campaign will be launched in January 2022 and NYAS will then work with Cardiff Local Authority to ensure that the

experiences of children and young people moving and improved and carried out in a respectful way.

10. Bright Sparks members have continued to work with PhotoVoice on their Care Leavers in Focus project. The project develops advocacy materials with care experienced young people to inform and improve services and support for young people leaving care.
11. To ensure the voices of care-experienced young people are central in championing change, participants shared their views of what is working and what could be improved in their support by engaging in photography and storytelling workshops. The insights from the initial workshops identified the thematic areas of Identity, Belonging, On-going support, Voice, Being Prepared and Looking forward.
12. The theme that was the focus in this period is Belonging and the group tested the resources and reflected on imagery and use of language related to the concepts of:
 - Home – friendships, siblings
 - Contact – keeping in touch
 - A support network
 - A feeling of ease
 - Housing
 - Having a sense of home

After the launch of these resources later in 2021 the Corporate Parenting Officer shall be engaging with PhotoVoice to ensure that Cardiff is one of the Local Authorities who utilises these resources within Children's services.

13. Children in Wales facilitated a session on independent living which included "When I am Ready" which gives all young people living with foster families in Wales the right to stay with their foster carers once they reach the age of 18. In this meeting he demonstrated how to use resources on their website related to life skills, employment, benefits and entitlements, leaving care, food shopping tips, getting around, decorating homes, keeping yourself safe, housing, universal credit and utilities. Information was also shared on the St David's Day fund – the eligibility criteria and how to apply.
14. As a first step in partnership working with the Active Involvement Team a Senior Youth Work Officer facilitated a workshop on finances which complimented the previous workshop facilitated by Children in Wales. The session covered benefits and tax credits, student entitlements, budgeting and support available. The session included a case study to check knowledge.

Other Work Undertaken

15. Bright Sparks have been updated on the Welsh Youth Parliament and informed that NYAS were successful in their application to be a Partner Organisation. They have been consulted on how they feel the NYAS representative in the parliament should be elected. decided on. Children and young people will be supported to apply for the role.
16. Bright Sparks were a part of activities in the summer at the Summer of Smiles at Cardiff City Hall. The NYAS Participation Officer and IV Co-ordinator hosted a section of the event which members of the group also attended. This provided an opportunity to promote the work of Bright Sparks, learn about participation work in Cardiff and to meet staff from the other stalls at the event. Other organisations and projects present included Cascade Voices, TGP Cymru and Children in Wales. In keeping with the fun theme NYAS hosted a Hula Hoop workshop which was enjoyed by many of those attending the day.
17. Trained Bright Sparks members continue to sit on interview panels for Advocacy and IV positions. A member also sat on the panel to recruit the new NYAS Service Manager for Cardiff.
18. Bright Sparks members have been integral in the planning of the event on October 29th 2021 where members of Bright Sparks and the Corporate Parenting Advisory Committee will meet in a meaningful and fun way. Plans have been developed for an in-person meeting at Insole Court in Cardiff. Risk management procedures in regard to Covid regulations will be followed and the safety of all in attendance will be paramount.
19. Following initial consultations with the group they decided that rather than attending a CPAC committee meeting they would prefer to meet in a less formal environment. This will be an opportunity for Bright Sparks to update on the work that they have been doing on the 5 Priorities which helped inform the Corporate Parenting Strategy. By the end of the meeting Bright Sparks will have had the opportunity to meet the Councillors and will have gained an insight into them and their role.

Financial Implications

20. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report and the funding for this participation comes from the National Youth Advocacy Service.

Legal Implications

21. There are no legal implications arising from this report

RECOMMENDATION

22. The Committee is recommended to note the Participation update and to make any observations or comments.

DEBORAH DRIFFIELD
Director Children's Services
28 September 2021