

Delegated Officer Report

Decision Maker: Maggie Kufeldt - Executive Director Health and Wellbeing

Date of Decision: 7th March 2018

Subject: Children's Champion Scheme

Report Author: Neil Consterdine - Head of Service Public Health, Youth and Leisure

Ward (s): All – no consultation required

Reason for the decision:

It is recommended that a 2 year fixed term post is created that will enable further development of the Children's Champion Scheme and achieve longer term sustainability. There is a clear appetite for the growth of the Champion's Scheme and we have an increase in professionals interested in becoming Champions. The scheme is currently at capacity. To enable the development and growth of the programme an increase in capacity to manage and develop the scheme is therefore required.

The revised Children's Champion Scheme has been in existence for approximately 2 years. The scheme was set up to ensure that corporate parenting responsibilities within the Council and across key partner agencies, were not only recognised but implemented into practice. It contributes to support progress and positive outcomes for children looked after and care leavers. The scheme has experienced significant success, including an increase in senior management and Elected Member involvement, which has led to an increased knowledge and understanding of children looked after, care leavers, their needs and how those needs should be met.

The role of the Participation Officer has developed over the past 2 years with a greater workload that includes regional and national youth participation

opportunities. The Children's Champion Scheme has already led to an increased demand on the Participation Officer's time, increasing the scheme would be impossible within the current capacity levels.

The needs of the young people can often be complex, challenging and require high levels of support from both the Champion and in turn the Participation Officer. For each young person, at any given time, there can be a need for support and intervention that requires dedicated attention from the Participation Officer; both giving direct support to a young person and to the Champion.

This report will provide the background of the scheme, success and impact to date on the young people, Children's Champions and overall services for looked after children. The report will then discuss the current position of the scheme, the proposal for further improvement and development and the resources required to sustain the scheme and its positive outcomes long term.

Summary:

The aims of the Children's Champion Scheme are to enable:

- Senior management to be pro-active in exercising and developing their corporate parenting role and responsibilities.
- Senior management from within the Council and key partner agencies (Champions) within Oldham to gain a greater understanding of the needs of looked after children and care leavers, and to assist and support children and young people in ensuring identified needs are met.
- Young people to build positive and meaningful relationships with their corporate parents / Champions that support the achievement of positive outcomes.
- To enable young people to have a consistent adult relationship with appropriate adults outside of their initial care.
- To give young people the opportunity to gain work experience.
- To provide young people with an advocate who can champion a quality experience from services provided for looked after children and care leavers.
- To offer support to Champions and young people.

Where Are We Now?

There are currently 14 young people and Champions successfully matched and positive ongoing relationships are being maintained.

Our existing champions are:

- ❖ Maggie Kufeldt
- ❖ Carolyn Wilkins
- ❖ Kim Scragg
- ❖ Dianne Frost
- ❖ Elaine McClean
- ❖ Denise Worth
- ❖ Siobhan Ebdon
- ❖ Emma Gilmartin
- ❖ Neil Consterdine
- ❖ Lianne Davis
- ❖ Cllr Dave Murphy
- ❖ Cllr Diane Williamson
- ❖ Jonathan Phillips
- ❖ Anne Clarke

Three champions have since left the scheme due to capacity issues. Being a Champion is embedded within the role and responsibilities of the above senior managers but it needs to be recognised a lot of personal time and commitment is required to truly support young people. It is not just a job! To support the scheme a 'Buddying Scheme' is on offer, utilising the more experienced and confident Champions to offer support to newly appointed Champions. There are currently four looked after young people aged 16 or below, and ten care leavers post sixteen involved. The young people at present all reside in either foster care or are living semi / independently. The young people currently involved have a variety of complex needs in relation to: emotional and physical health and wellbeing, safeguarding, unsettled care placements, finances and independent skills, education, training and employment.

Outcomes and Impact to Date:

- Improved educational experiences - including a young person being allocated a place in an 'outstanding' school, following initial refusal of a place.
- Existing trusting relationships between looked after children, care leavers and their corporate parents.
- Increased access to services to meet the needs of children looked after and care leavers.
- Ensuring care leavers have the necessary information and awareness of the necessary

financial benefits to ensure economic wellbeing.

- Increased emotional support both for children looked after and care leavers from a trusting adult who has responsibility for them and their outcomes.
- Support, encouragement and access to further education, training and employment.
- Support to identify and secure suitable independent housing for care leavers.
- Sharing of information and involvement in discussions relating to improved outcomes for individual young people.
- Robust advocacy in place for children looked after and care leavers involved in the scheme.
- Access to a range of positive activities and experiences that improve emotional wellbeing and raise aspirations.

Outcome Statement from a Champion (involved long term):

"This has been an interesting year from a Children's Champion perspective. There were some serious issues in her foster placement that required a period of intense intervention from her Social Worker to get both her placement and her life back on track. This highlighted how fragile a placement can be dependent on the situation and motives of the child. It also demonstrated that the relationship between the Social Worker and Children's Champion is key to successful outcomes. Jayshri and I worked together during that period, discussing options to turn the situation around and thankfully with the support of the young person's Foster Carers this was achieved.

In addition, the young person moved from primary to high school. This is a significant change in any young person's life, but for a looked after child it is critical that the right school placement and education is provided by the local authority. Blue Coat School was the first choice for her. However, given the schools entrance criteria and the demand for that school, we were unsuccessful in securing a place. Both the Social Worker and I worked on the appeal and I attended the hearing to present the case. Again we were unsuccessful, and it took the Head Teacher to approach me when a place had become available before we secured a place there for her. This was an amazing outcome and according to school, the young person has settled well into Blue Coat's routine and is starting to show that she will achieve her potential there. My concern throughout this particular stage in

the young person's life was the hurdles that I encountered to secure a place at the school, that I and others were confident would give her the best chance to succeed in her life both from a social and educational perspective. This is something that should be addressed for other looked after children in our care who are not so fortunate to have a Children's Champion to support our Social Workers and Foster Carers.

So for me these two situations that cropped up this year highlight the benefit of the Children's Champion Scheme, and how the scheme can make a difference to a young person's life who needs a little help."

Outcome Statement from Champion (newly appointed):

"I am new to the Children's Champion role and Children's Social Care Services in general. Upon entering this new arena I could immediately see the benefits of a Children's Champion Scheme, particularly when 'gaps' in the system appear. Being able to support a young person in care in whatever capacity is required at a given time in their life is essential. Though circumstances and people may change, a Champion can offer consistent support, the level of which will invariably change as the young person's needs change throughout their young life."

"I have already experienced the importance of supporting a young person to not only have a voice, but to have the confidence to use that voice in difficult and sometimes intimidating situations. Having an impartial role can provide support as simple as listening or asking questions that enable the young person to view a situation from all angles and reflect on their thoughts and actions."

Outcome Statement from Foster Carer:

"We would like to offer our opinions on the Children's Champion who have been working with ourselves and our looked after children. We currently work with two different Champions; a different one for each of the two children placed with us. The Champions are essentially an advocate for our children. They take them out for a few hours on each visit, and the children will enjoy visits to events such as firework displays, Christmas light switch-on, trips to the circus and even a tour around a football stadium. Each Champion understands the needs and preferences of our children and they choose where they go to get the most enjoyment and to better benefit the child's

interests. We have found their approach to be warm, generous, friendly and communicative. We consider them to be a highly-positive addition to our role as carers and feel we work very well together.

The children are always keen to see their Champions and look forward to their trips out. They always arrive home in a positive mood and speak highly of their Champions.

We have often spoken with a Champion when a particular problem might present itself and we can liaise with the Champion when a strategy has been formulated. We have found this to be highly beneficial to ourselves, our Champions and especially our children.”

Outcome Statement from Young Person (allocation of Champion 1 year)

“Having a Champion has helped me in so many ways. It has helped my confidence and enabled me to think differently about the professionals I come into contact with and the care I receive. This has led to me thinking differently about certain situations and think differently about how I can speak about things that are on my mind.

Having a Champion that knows about care leavers and their entitlements has helped me become more independent, and this has improved my mental health. Helping me with my Council Tax reduction was such a relief as he completed all the paperwork and kept me informed of decisions being made.

It’s really nice to be able to speak to someone that understands you and wants to be there and support you.”

Outcomes for Services

The outcomes for overall services, the Council and key partner agencies also require a level of recognition as a result of the Children's Champion Scheme. Relationships that are developed and maintained have enabled individuals from services to increase their knowledge and understanding of looked after children and care leavers, and advocate their needs within their own services. This increases the awareness of such a vulnerable group of children and young people within our own local borough, and helps services make a real difference in meeting their needs - which can only have a positive impact on services and resources in the longer term. If the scheme is enabled to be developed, the recognition from

governing bodies will continue to recognise the positive engagement and implementation of their corporate parenting roles and responsibilities, and the impact on positive outcomes for looked after children and care leavers.

Next Steps

In order to develop new, as well as maintain existing relationships within the Children's Champion Scheme, there is a continuous need to promote the scheme across all Council departments, Elected Members and key partner agencies such as Health, the Police and the Voluntary Sector. To implement this successfully there is a need to:

- Identify and process new referrals.
- Co-ordinate appropriate matching processes.
- Provide induction, training and introductions between Champions and children looked after.
- Provide support to children looked after, Champions and other professionals relating to the scheme, and individual young people.
- A continuous need to review, monitor, supervise and support the overall scheme and individual relationships.

The Participation Officer has been responsible for the scheme since its pre-launch and has been accountable for its development over the past two years. The Participation Officer, over the two year period of responsibility and accountability, has reduced working hours. Due to reduction in working hours, and the continuance and development of the Children's Champion Scheme (being only one part of the main duties and responsibilities of the Participation Officer), there is now an identified lack of capacity to take the Children's Champion Scheme to the next stage of its development. For example not only to increase numbers of successful matches but also to increase engagement amongst those in residential care or out of borough placements and enable longer term stability for the overall scheme.

What are the alternative option(s) to be considered? Please give the reason(s) for recommendation(s):

Option 1 - To note the report and take no action. Continue to deliver the scheme as it currently is, with the current levels of staffing capacity. This would mean we have a capped number of participants of 15 at any one time.

Option 2 - Cease to deliver the programme and redirect existing capacity into other projects and programmes.

Option 3 – (Preferred Option) Develop the programme to enable more young people to benefit from having a Champion. Employ a Level 1 Youth Worker full time (initially for 2 years) to develop and grow the scheme alongside the Participation Officer. This role will enable a programme to be delivered that grows the scheme in such a way to enable its own longer term sustainability.

This increase in capacity will enable us to deliver:

- Develop an induction and training programme for an increased number of new Champions creating sustainability.
- Devise a 'Train the Trainer' programme for existing Champions so that in future existing Champions can take on the role of training and supporting new Champions.
- Enable the ongoing high levels of support and development of Champions from the Youth Service Team, supporting them with challenges, offering advice and guidance.
- Widen the promotion of the scheme to the wider workforce and in turn increase our ability to recruit and retain new Champions at a variety of levels across the Council and partner organisations.
- Provide information and briefing workshops for Social Care staff, carers and other professionals to embed the scheme widely.
- Provide comprehensive monitoring and evaluation of the scheme, ensuring quality, safeguarding and reporting on the outcomes achieved on a regular basis.

Consultation :

Discussion at the Corporate parenting conference highlighted that more officers from within the council and from our partners had an interest to become involved in the Children's Champion programme. Young people also highlighted the benefits to them as individuals and the need to expand the programme.

Recommendation(s):

The preferred option would be Option 3 to develop a 2 year fixed term post that will enable further development of the Children's Champion Scheme, achieve longer term sustainability and enable more of our young people to benefit from the scheme. The financial implications of this would be £30,500 per

year to cover the cost of the full time youth worker post.

The scheme would also benefit from a development fund, approx. £5k per year to support some of the activities and interventions with the Champions and their young people. Funding would need to be found for this either from the wider Council or from within the service.

Implications:

*What are the **financial** implications?*

The cost of this proposal is £30,500 per annum for two years on a fixed term basis for a level 1 youth worker, in addition there is a £5,000 development fund each year the total cost will therefore be £71,000. The full cost in the first year and £23,500 of the cost in year 2 will be met by fully utilising the £60,000 Youth Council reserve held by the integrated youth service. The additional £11,000, if required in 2019/20 (i.e. subject full utilisation of the development fund) will be met from within the existing youth budget.

Carl Holdaway

What are the **procurement** implications?

N/A

*What are the **legal** implications?*

Non (Paul Entwistle)

*What are the **Human Resources** implications?*

The preferred option if agreed will provide additional capacity to ensure that the Children's Champion Scheme can be up scaled across the Council and partner organisations. The post of Level 1 Youth Worker has been graded through our Pay and reward Team, as this post is already established within the service, the proposal is to increase existing capacity to meet the demand.

The funding for these posts is fixed term (2 years) and therefore it should be noted that if the funding ceases then there could be a liability in relation to redundancy costs.

People Services will explore recruitment options with the service which will seek, where possible, to mitigate liability. This will be undertaken in line with Council

policies and procedures. (Emma Gilmartin - People Services Business Partner)

Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment attached or not required because (please give reason)

An EIA is not required. The service is already established and the report is proposing to further develop the Children's Champion programme.

What are the **property implications**

N/A

Risks:

If the preferred option is approved then there are no risks at this stage. If the option to appoint a post is not approved then the risk is that vulnerable young people will lose a valuable support service as demand for Children's Champions could not be met. This is then likely to mean an increased demand on higher level and higher costing services.

Co-operative agenda

The proposals in this report link to all for the FORWARD values within the co-operative vision and in particular, the Council will be working with young people to demonstrate the values of democracy.


Has the relevant Legal Officer confirmed that the recommendations within this report are lawful and comply with the Council's Constitution? Yes

Has the relevant Finance Officer confirmed that any expenditure referred to within this report is consistent with the Council's budget? Yes

Are any of the recommendations within this report contrary to the Policy Framework of the Council? No

List of Background Papers under Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972:


| Title | Available from |
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| Report Author Sign-off: | |
| MEL CONSTERDINE |  |
| Date: 16/3/18 | |

Please list and attach any appendices:-

| Appendix number or letter | Description |
|---------------------------|-------------|
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In consultation with Director/Executive Director



Signed :

Date: 06/03/2018

