



## **Derby City Pledge**

Volunteering Matters were asked by Derby City Council to seek the views of the Children In Care Council regarding the Pledge. At their meeting in June 2015 we invited the CICC to take a fresh look at the Derby City Pledge, asking them to reflect on what the Pledge meant to them and whether or not they wished to make changes to it.

The general consensus was that the current pledge is too wordy and too lengthy. The young people compared the Derby Pledge to examples from other local authorities; they preferred the layout of others, particularly Stafford County Council. During the CICC meeting in June, the young people were handed a copy of the current Pledge and asked to consider which of the 28 points were most important to them. The young people agreed that they would like to see a more concise document, so that people are able to see at a glance, what matters most to Derby's looked after children.

Having examined the current Pledge in detail, assisted by staff at Volunteering Matters, the current Pledge was condensed into eleven points. Those points were made into a questionnaire the intention being to seek the views of other looked after children.

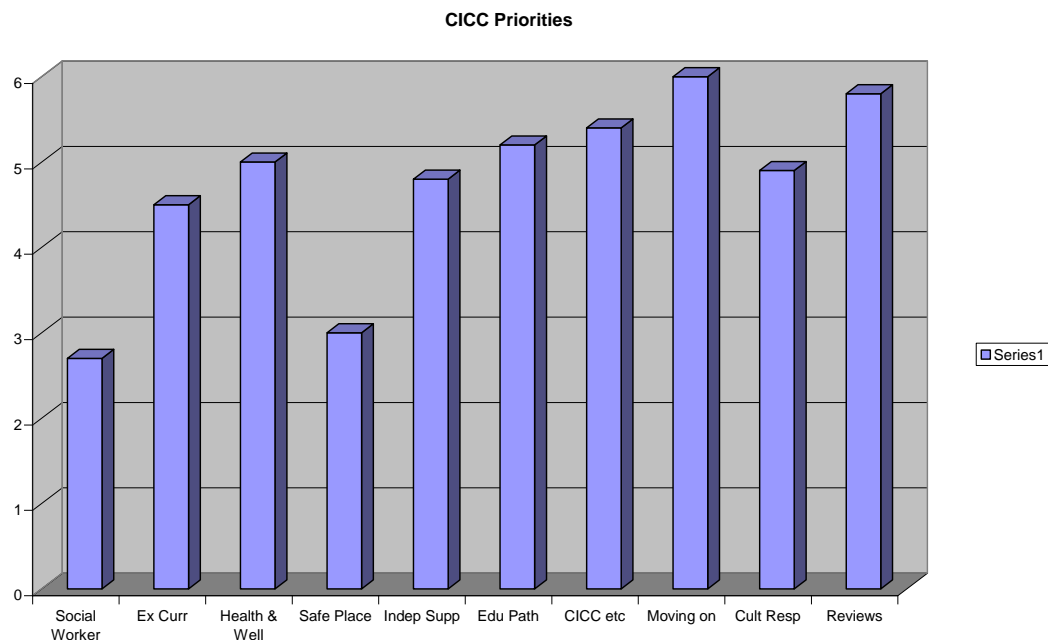
As the number of young people attending the Children In Care Council fluctuates particularly over the Summer period, it was decided that it was important to utilise the sister services provided by Volunteering Matters for Derby City Council. Consequently, we enlisted the support of Independent Advocates during children's homes meetings and Independent Visitors. Furthermore, young people were consulted via the Focus On Us quarterly newsletter and the questionnaire was posted to all looked after young people of Derby aged 8years+. The consultation period ran between June and late August 2015. 55 young people shared their views through one of the aforementioned formats.

The completed questionnaires and comments were analyzed and the information collated. In summary, the questionnaire asked children to rank in importance on a scale of 1 – 10 their priorities regarding the condensed pledge (1 = most important, 10 = less important). The findings are:

Order of Priority	Pledge – condensed into ten statements by CICC & Volunteering Matters	Average rating
1	Access to your social worker	2.7
2	A safe place to live where you have choices	3
3	Extra curricular activities/interests	4.5
4	Access to independent support	4.8
5	Cultural respect and encouragement	4.9
6	Access to health and wellbeing services	5

7	A clear education path and access to advice	5.2
8	Access to CICC and other services	5.4
9	Regular reviews of your placement and needs	5.8
10	Support to prepare for leaving care and moving on	6

It is clear from the response that regular access to their social worker is most important to most children, closely followed by a safe place to live.



This information provided a base from which to develop a revised Pledge – reflective of the young people’s wishes and feelings. Volunteering Matters liaised with Derby City Council to seek their views as to how these findings could be incorporated to ensure that the finished article would be a meaningful and workable document for both looked after children and their corporate parent.

Additional consultation was held with the Children In Care Council, asking the young people to elaborate on the consultation document i.e. does the Pledge make a difference to them, some of their comments were:

#### **Contact with Social Workers**

“Once I had to wait three months to speak to my social worker”

“You need to be able to contact your social worker when you need them and you can’t”

“We should be given their numbers; we only get a number for the Council House we never get a direct number, sometimes when you ring the switchboard, they don’t know who you are on about”

“Sometimes the social worker doesn’t come when they are suppose to”

“When I was living in another City, I was trying to get hold of my social worker and I just kept getting past around, I wasn’t given the right number”

**Safe Place to live**

"Once I was in a place just for two weeks then I had to move again, it shouldn't be like that"

"I was told I was moving to a Children's home but I didn't know where it was or anything about it"

"You need to feel safe, I didn't always feel safe and staff knew that I didn't, other people were smashing things up in the place and things were getting robbed"

**Extra Curricular Activities**

"This is important and there aren't enough things for people to do"

"We just go to the cinema and it gets boring, why can't we do other stuff"

"I think the children's homes should get together with them in foster homes, we don't get to do that we just mix with other children's homes"

**Access to Services**

"I think that not enough children see services, people need to learn how to say no to things that I are offered – children need better safeguarding, I've had counselling but others need it too"

**Independent Support**

"If you don't want to stay somewhere you need to be able to contact someone straight away"

"it's really bad when you can't talk to someone – staff get busy, when I got their they took me shopping to by clothes and things but then someone had taken an overdose then I think they got rewarded, there was no time for me after that, they shouldn't have treated them like that"

**Education**

"I want to be able to get a good job and go to college"

"Some people are idle and don't want to do anything – I think in Foster care it's harder to skive because in a children's home they can't force you to go to school, I know one child who missed the whole of year 11 because he wouldn't get out of bed"

**Support for Leaving Care**

"My leaving care worker is unreliable; they are never there when I phone"

"I only got my leaving care worker just four months before I'm 18, I don't think that's right"

"My social said they would come and see me on my birthday, but they didn't"

**Cultural Respect**

"You should know who you are; I think this is really important for people"

"You should at least be able to work with your social worker to have this"

**Regular Reviews**

"I don't always know when meetings are held, I find out late, I might have made plans to see my family, I'm not going to change my plans so I don't go to the meetings"

"You need to know when meetings are so you can prepare for them"

"It's our life, we want to know what decisions are being made and that they are right"

"I want to be at my own meetings, but I don't always get told about them in time"

Finally, supplementary research was conducted by Volunteering Matters to consider how Pledges are presented by other local authorities – many offer interactive web sites as part of their presentation – however, we do not have evidence to suggest that these are accessed by looked after children. Furthermore, staff considered the guidance lay down by NICE which aims to improve the quality of life and experience of looked after children. (<http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ph28/chapter/Principles-and-values>).

Listening to the comments of the young people, combining them with the initial findings and the brief provided by Derby City Council, VM staff created a new version of the Pledge. The Children In Care Council have asked that all local authority staff sign an abbreviated version of the Pledge, perhaps in the format of a business card, keeping it with them – possibly on the reverse of their identification badges, reinforcing the importance of the document. The working copy of the revised Pledge is now returned to the corporate parent for further consideration and comment.