



Department  
for Education

# Children in Care Council Newsletter

Issue 1 – May 2011

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## Message from Tim Loughton, Children's Minister



To all Children in Care Councils,

Firstly, can I take this opportunity to thank you all for the work you do in your Children in Care Councils (CICC). Giving up your own time to try to improve things for other children in care is hugely impressive. It's one reason why I think we in Government owe it to you to give you all the support and help we can offer.

So we're supporting the development of CICC's. Virtually every local authority has set up a CICC but some are more effective and well established than others. Therefore, we're funding A National Voice to run regional meetings for members of CICC's across the country. These will help you learn from each other, so you can make sure your local authority is doing everything it can to help you and all the other children and young people you represent. I hope your CICC is able to attend these meetings.

I am firmly committed to the principle that a successful care system must listen to your voice. I want to see you driving improvements in the care system. That's why I regularly meet children and young people in care and care leavers to learn from them about their experience. It's also why I have set up a web page, Tell Tim, where you can directly send me your thoughts about the care system. I want you to let me know your thoughts about what works and what doesn't, and the ideas you might have about changes that would make a difference, to you and others. I want to be able to find out what matters to you and people like you, so that I can make sure I'm putting all my efforts into the things that will make the most difference. Go to the website to get in touch:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/families/childrenincare/telltim>

However, I don't want this to be a one way conversation. That's why I've asked my Department to put together a newsletter for all of you to learn about what the Government is doing for looked after children. Hopefully you'll find it useful. It should at least give you a few things to ask your local authorities about and to share with all the children in care in your authority.

Best of luck with all of your CICC's' work in the year ahead. CICC's are really important to me and you have a really important voice through them which I want to be heard, and more importantly acted on – so don't hold back. I know you have some really exciting and important action plans and ideas to get on with. And I look forward to hearing from you!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tim Loughton". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line that extends to the left.

Tim Loughton,  
Children's Minister

## CICC regional meetings

We hope that those of you who were able to attend the first round of CICC regional meetings – with the Children’s Rights Director, Roger Morgan, and the charity, A National Voice – found them to be useful. We really appreciate all the work you do in your own CICC’s and are grateful for you giving up your time to attend these meetings.

We’re going to hold two more meetings between now and next April in each region. The dates of the first round are below.

- West Midlands, Birmingham, Wednesday 15 June
- London, Department for Education, Thursday 16 June
- North West, Manchester, Tuesday 21 June
- North East, Gateshead, Thursday 30 June
- East, Colchester, Wednesday 6 July
- Yorkshire & Humber, Leeds, Wednesday 13 July
- South West, Bristol, Wednesday 20 July
- East Midlands, Leicester, Wednesday 7 September
- South East, London (DfE), Wednesday 21 September

Your Participation officers should have all the details – if not please ask them to contact A National Voice - [info@anationalvoice.org](mailto:info@anationalvoice.org) - who are organising the meetings.

We’re going to talk about education and independent reviewing officers in these meetings – see below for more information. However, there will also be an opportunity for you to raise the issues that matter most to your CICC’s. You may want to think about these before the meetings.

## Foster Carers’ Charter

The Government recently launched the Foster Carers’ Charter. We produced this with help from children in foster care, fostering organisations, and charities.

It sets out clear principles about how foster carers should be treated by local authorities and fostering services to enable them to give the best possible care to the children they look after.

It also sets out a few rules for foster carers themselves. It asks them to treat children in their care as if they were their own child. Also, to do all they can to make placements work.

We are asking all local authorities to talk to their foster carers and children in foster care about how they are meeting the principles in the Charter.

You can read the full charter here.

<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/t/the%20foster%20carers%20charter.pdf>

Has your local authority signed up to the charter? If yes, how will they make sure they live up to it? These are just a couple of questions you may wish to ask your Corporate Parenting Board... And if they haven't signed up, it is up to the CICC to put pressure on them to do so: tell them the Minister told you to!

## Young person's guide to your care plans, placement and reviews

Did you know that your local authority should now be following new rules about your care plans, placements, reviews and leaving care services? Updated 'regulations and guidance' ('the law' in Government speak!) were introduced in April this year. These were put together with help from what young people told us.

If local authorities follow the regulations, we hope it will improve the quality of your care. For example, it should mean that:

- you live with foster carers or in a children's home which supports you
- you don't keep moving from one place to another without good reason
- your opinions are listened to in your reviews
- the support you get when you leave care will help you find a job and a good place to live.

We thought it might be helpful if Children in Care Councils found out about the new regulations so they know what their local authority should be doing for children in care.

So we've worked with the Children's Rights Director to produce a young person's guide. You may not want to read it all in one go but it will be useful if you ever need to check if your local authority or social worker is doing what they should be. You can download it at: <https://www.rights4me.org/newsView.cfm?newsID=108>

We'll also be giving out copies at our next CICC regional meetings.

## Independent reviewing officers

Hopefully, you'll all know your independent reviewing officer or 'IRO'. They are the people who often chair reviews for children in care. Their job is to make sure that your wishes are heard and considered. They should meet you before review meetings to listen to your views.

Like the Young Person's guide to care planning, we also thought it would be useful for you to have a guide to the IRO Handbook.

It's available here: <http://tinyurl.com/dyh5sbm>

The IRO Handbook was also put together with the help of young people's views, and it tells you what IROs should be doing for children in care.

We're going to be talking about IROs in our next round of regional meetings for CICC's. If your CICC is planning to attend, what would you like to tell us about your IROs? What is good or bad about them?

## **Education**

### **The Pupil Premium for looked after children**

Did you know that all looked after children who have been looked after for 6 months are eligible for the pupil premium of £430? This money will be given to your school by your local authority. Your school can then decide how best to use it to meet your needs and provide appropriate extra support.

From September 2012 schools will have to report to parents about how they have used it. Your local authority as a 'corporate parent' will be asking about how the pupil premium has been used to support you and other children in care.

Is this something your Children in Care Council would like to be involved in? Would you like your local authority to discuss with you how schools in your area are generally using the pupil premium?

If you were to quiz headteachers, what would you want to see them spending the money on? One-to-one tuition? Extracurricular activities?

We'll be talking about this and education more generally at our next regional meetings too, so tell your CICC representative who will be attending your views.

### **EMA replacement for looked after children**

Hopefully you've heard that the Government has announced a new £180 million bursary scheme to replace Educational Maintenance Allowance which supported young people in further education.

The scheme will start in September 2011 and the money will be given out by colleges. Looked after children and care leavers who continue in education or training at 16 will be given guaranteed bursaries of £1,200 a year. This is more than you would have received through the EMA.

Schools and colleges can decide if the bursary is paid weekly, monthly or annually.

You can find out more details about this at:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/inthenews/inthenews/a0076112/180-million-new-bursary-scheme-to-help-the-most-vulnerable-16-19-year-olds>

## Ministerial meetings with children in care, adopted children and care leavers

The Minister regularly meets children in care and care leavers around the country, and also on a quarterly basis within the Department. We thought you might like to see some of the issues raised by these children and young people directly with the Minister.

### Children in foster care

The Minister has met twice with a group of foster carers, most recently in March to discuss the Foster Carers' Charter. Key messages about how to improve the support they receive included:

- Foster carers regularly meeting senior officials from the local authority to discuss the support they receive
- Training foster carers, particularly to support young people preparing to leave care
- Looked after children and care leavers being involved in training social workers to help them understand what it's like to be in care
- Experienced foster carers mentoring new foster carers
- Young people being able to stay with their carers past their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.

### Children who have been adopted

- Educate people more about adoption including teaching about adoption in PSHE lessons
- Teachers should be given training on adoption and the issues children who are adopted will have to face at school
- Improve the support provided to maintain contact between adopted children and birth family, particularly siblings
- Support adopted children and their families – “the issues don't go away once you're adopted: they start”.

### Care leavers

- There was a general lack of aspiration for care leavers among social workers.
- The support provided to care leavers was not consistent across the country.
- Care leavers often felt very isolated once they left care.
- Foster carers rarely provided support to learn life skills.

The Minister is meeting with a group of children in residential care and a separate group of care leavers in June.

## Complaints and comments

Although most of us try to avoid complaining about things, when you have a good reason, making a complaint is an important way to improve things. There are also times when you have something to say about a service you've received but don't want to make a complaint.

So it's important children in care know that local authorities must have, by law, a procedure for listening to any comment or complaint made by the children they look after.

(Sometimes the word representation is used instead of complaint, comment or suggestion, but it means the same thing, it's just the word that's used in law.)

Remember...

**YOU HAVE THE RIGHT** to make a comment or a complaint about services or accommodation you have received, or a local authority's refusal to provide these things. You might have a suggestion about how things might be done better. Don't be put off – it's your right to have your say.

Your local authority must publicise the way they deal with comments and complaints, so there should be leaflets or posters for you to read. See if you can get hold of one! Does it tell you about representations?

Did you already know about this right? Are you able to help make sure that other children in care in your local authority know about it?

## Advocates

An advocate is someone to help you express and argue your feelings and opinions. They can also support you if you want to make a formal complaint.

IROs have a responsibility to make sure that all children in care in your area are made aware of their right to an advocate if they want one.

Every child has the right to be supported by an advocate. Your local authority must have a system in place to provide written, age appropriate information to each looked after child about advocates and how to get one.

There is also a national advocacy service run by the charity Voice who can provide you with an advocate within 48 hours (Freephone 0808 800 5792).

## Select Committee response

For those of you who are interested in finding out more about what the Government is doing for looked after children (and for you budding politicians – I know there's plenty of you!) you may wish to read its response to the House of Commons' Education Select Committee on the subject. This gives an outline of all Government policies, including foster care, education, health, children's homes, adoption and more.

It's available on the Parliament website here:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmselect/cmeduc/924/92404.htm>

## Feedback

Have you found this newsletter helpful? How would you improve it? Please send any comments you'd like to make to [alex.ingram@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:alex.ingram@education.gsi.gov.uk)



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