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A LILAC assessment of Kent County Council originally took place in late September and early October 2014 against the **7 LILAC Standards** that represent a quality participation service. On that occasion Kent were awarded the LILAC Mark for four Standards – Shared Values, Recruitment and Selection, Care Planning and Review and Complaints and Advocacy. It was decided that the LILAC Mark should not be awarded for Style of Leadership, Structures and Staffing.

The LILAC Assessors returned in September 2015 to reassess against these three Standards. This report will focus particularly on these three Standards but will pass comment on the progress made against the recommendations made in relation to the four other Standards.

ABOUT LILAC

Lilac is a project run by **A National Voice**. The key purpose of LILAC is to draw upon the experiences and expertise of care-experienced young people to improve the policy and practice of agencies in how they involve and consult with children in care and care leavers. It does this by using a framework of quality standards for involvement which has been developed by care-experienced young people. Young people from care are trained to assess the performance of agencies against the LILAC standards. LILAC involves care-experienced young people:

- ✘ Carrying out assessments of how well services involve and consult with children and young people
- ✘ Delivering training on participation and the LILAC standards

The LILAC standards are based on the well-known *Hear By Right* approach to participation but they have been developed to closely reflect the nature of the care system. They have been developed by care-experienced young people to reflect what is important to them. Each standard is backed by a number of criteria to ensure a robust methodology that focuses on quality over processes.

THE TEAM

Two trained Assessors took part in this Assessment: Ahmed Mahmud and Jade Aitken. These young people have many years combined care experience and have lived in a wide range of placements including foster care, residential care, kinship placements, supported lodgings and independence. They have been trained by LILAC to deliver training and to carry out assessments.

LILAC Assessors act as outstanding role-models for other young people in care, having achieved a variety of accomplishments including owning their own home, being in paid employment, doing apprenticeships and succeeding in both further and higher education. Their main motivation behind being involved in the project is to improve the lives of looked-after children and give children and young people in care a voice.

THE ASSESSMENT

This Assessment is based on:

- 1 Policies, procedures and other information provided by Kent County Council.
- 2 Three days spent 'on-site' conducting both group and individual interviews with children and young people, foster carers and members of children's social care staff.
- 3 Responses to online questionnaires for children and young people, foster carers and staff. Kent have 1203 looked after young people at the time of the re-assessment over 10 years old. We received 185 replies from young people, this is 15% of the total number, sufficient to gain a sense of how young people feel about the services they are receiving. We received 138 completed questionnaires from foster carers and 126 from staff.

SUMMARY OF ASSESSMENT

Kent is a large local authority with a large number of young people in care. It is also facing immense problems resulting from the increased numbers of unaccompanied asylum seekers arriving into the authority.

Overall, we were impressed with the progress made in the last year to implement the recommendations in our previous report. We found a strong commitment at all levels of management and staff to genuinely listen to and respond to the views of young people. In particular, at Director and Elected Member level there is an understanding of the need to design services based on what young people say they need and a clear message that services should be young people friendly. The recommendations in the original LILAC Report were reported to young people through the OCYPC newsletters and to members through the Corporate Parenting Panel. Young people were able to comment and make suggestions at meetings of the OCYPC and other events and there has been a serious strategic response to the report.

The work of the VSK Participation Team and the Care Leaver Apprentices is well known and respected. They have a presence across the Children's Social Care Directorate that is getting closer to ensuring that all young people and carers know of the opportunities open to young people to contribute to participation activities. There has been an increase in participation activity and the way it seeks to allow young people from all over the County to get involved.

Having said that in the year between the surveys of young people there has not been any major changes in their perception of how well their views are listened to and respected. The staff survey did show that more believe that managers make themselves available, young people are able to get involved and their views are listened to in reviews. This suggests that whilst change is happening more work needs to be done to translate convince young people that the change is real.

With this proviso we have decided that sufficient progress has been made in the last year to award Kent County Council the LILAC Charter Mark in two of the three areas previously thought to be inadequate. Whilst there have been positive developments against the Staff Standard we do not think that sufficient improvement has been made.

SUMMARY OF ASSESSMENT (CONTINUED)

A final question to young people in our survey was

“How far do you feel you have a say in what happens in your life”

Young people answered this question on a scale of 1-10.

Scale	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
%	2%	1%	2%	4%	15%	8%	11%	8%	12%	29%

STANDARD 2 STYLE OF LEADERSHIP

LILAC STANDARD ACHIEVED

Senior managers and elected members adopt a style of leadership that champions and promotes the involvement of children and young people at all levels of the local authority. They demonstrate the need to work in partnership with children and young people.

How Kent County Council achieved this Standard:

We want elected members and senior managers to be accessible to young people and model behaviour that demonstrates the importance of young people's views and transmit this throughout the organisation.

A constant theme of our meetings with staff and carers was that they felt there had been a significant change in the profile and approachability of elected members and senior managers in the last year. The percentage of staff saying they felt this was the case rose in the year from 31% to 56%.

Our meetings with elected members and senior managers demonstrated the efforts they are making to "change the culture" of the children's social care. The Looked After Children's and Care Leavers Strategy for 2015/6 has a priority to increase children and young people's impact on service design and delivery. In the period since the last LILAC Assessment the Cabinet Member for Specialist Children's Services has had 22 visits or meetings with children and young people.

The young people members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are usually Care Leaver Apprentices and there is evidence that they have a significant impact on the discussions and decisions of these meetings. Whilst young people from the OCYPC told us they had been to the Corporate Parenting Panel we would still like to see other young people also attending the CPB. There is a recognition that there needs to be representation of the needs of unaccompanied asylum seekers on the CPB and this is a future priority.

We heard of other examples that the culture of listening to young people is spreading. A recent report to a Select Committee on Corporate Parenting was rejected because members felt it did not have a strong enough voice of young people. A recent Children's Services Awareness session was attended by 38 members. Care Leaver Apprentices also attended a Children's Services Challenge Group of 200 managers from across the authority and received 27 expressions of interest to create apprenticeships for young people.

Whilst we were impressed with the progress made and the efforts made to improve in future there is no reason to believe "the job is done". Our survey of young people showed that the increase in staff feeling that senior managers are more approachable is not reflected in the views of young people.

STANDARD 2 STYLE OF LEADERSHIP

The percentage of young people who said they know who key senior managers are stayed the same at 20% and those who said they would be able to talk to them rose slightly from 20% to 26%. This is despite the recommendation we made about a postcard being given to young people with photographs of key people being implemented. All the members of the Young Adults Committee we met said that they have seen this postcard.

LILAC 2014 Recommendations

There should be a variety of children and young people sitting on the Corporate Parenting Board at least part of the meeting e.g. last or first 30 minutes to give updates and views about the care system and if any changes needs to be done.

Send a postcard to all children and young people showing the management structure of Kent County Council, with photos of the Director, Elected Member and other relevant senior managers. This should be repeated annually.

Amend the Foster Care guide to include photos and details of managers

Give young people more influence in setting the agenda in Kent County Council by allowing them to talk to senior managers in a structured way (although this is mentioned in the policy, it is not promoted well), ensuring participation is bottom-up as well as top-down.

Ensure that children and young people are approached to participate using a range of methods such as text message. This would go some way to ensuring the maximum audience is reached.

- A revised children and young people's guide to fostering is available on the KentCaresTown website. The language and layout is attractive and should be accessible to young people.
- Members of the Children in Care Councils said that they felt they were able to set the agenda. A significant development has been the Challenge Card system. Young people in our meetings said that this is a good way of raising issues and we were told of examples where these had gone to the Corporate Parenting Panel and taken. The KentCaresTown website has been expanded and there are discussions going on about developing or buying in a Phone App that will extend the range of methods young people can use to give their views.

STANDARD 3 STRUCTURES

LILAC STANDARD  ACHIEVED

Structures are in place to ensure that children and young people are involved in the planning and evaluation of services and that these structures are flexible. They do not rely on the involvement of a small articulate group of children and young people, but take into account different abilities, experiences and skills.

How Kent County Council achieved this Standard:

There is an overall Children's Services Participation Strategy.

We think that the range of structures and opportunities available to young people has improved since our last assessment. There are four regional OCYPC Groups, with County wide meetings happening twice a year. There is a new Young Adults Council that reflects the views of older young people in care and care leavers and a new Junior OCYPC has its first meeting this month. Records show that in 2015 40 young people expressed an interest in joining the OCYPC with a regular membership of 31, an increase from 25 in 2014. The YAC has 12 members. Some of the meetings of the different groups are attended by members of the Corporate Parenting Panel. 15 meetings were attended between January and August 2015.

There are many other opportunities for young people to give their views through fun days, participation days and awards events, 17 additional events have been held in the last year attended by 344 young people. In addition the new Challenge Cards have added a new opportunity for young people who may not want to attend meetings.

The VSK Participation Team are well resourced and staffed, a permanent staff of three supplemented with seven Apprentice Participation Workers. They produce regular newsletters that provide information and manage the KentCaresTown website. These are attractive advertisements for the work that the Team do.

Communication about the various OCYPC meetings via staff and carers is improving. Staff told us that the Care Leaver Apprentices are proactive in ensuring they have information (though few social workers seem to use the KentCaresTown website. 80% of staff said they felt that young people know how they can be involved in developing services with 73% saying that young people are given information. This is a significant increase on a year ago. Foster carers were more positive this year about both the information they receive and the possibility of things changing as a result. 60% said they know about the Participation team, an increase from 50% last year, but only 40% said they had encouraged young people to get involved, but 17% said they do this sometimes. Both groups of foster carers we met we met said they had noticed an improvement in information and opportunities in the last year.

STANDARD 3 STRUCTURES

However, there is once again evidence that the efforts to develop more comprehensive structures and improve communication has not yet had the desired impact on the knowledge that young people have. The percentage saying that they know about participation opportunities rose from 38% to 41%, with those not sure rising from 14% to 18%. 49% said they have been asked to give their views on the services they receive. There is obviously more work to be done in ensuring that most young people know that there are opportunities for them.

LILAC 2014 Recommendations

Improve communication across the structures to ensure that young people are heard and know how to be involved in shaping or improving of services over and above the opportunities to be a member of the OCYPC.

Deliver training for staff and foster carers on the importance of participation for all LAC to ensure that the new participation policy is implemented. This could be devised in-house, or is available from national charities such as ANV or Participation Works.

As time goes on, involve a wider range of children and young people in the development of the Children in Care Councils.

Produce a training policy stating what young people can expect from their involvement.

Employ a wider range of methods to involve young people by encouraging young people on the Children in Care Councils to take a lead in on-going service evaluation; for example, by reviewing the top 10 concerns for young people and the respective actions taken.

Establish on-going, clear and consistent feedback channels between children and young people and senior management on a formal basis e.g. as part of a newsletter sent to all children and young people.

- Apprentices have been involved in the Skills to Foster training programmes and have been involved in a workshop for newly qualified social workers. The content of these include the structures and opportunities children and young people have for participation. We would like to see these opportunities extended to other young people.
- Young people have taken part in various surveys, including the LILAC survey, that seek to evaluate services. In meetings young people said that they felt “surveyed out”. Apprentices have been consulted by the Commissioning Team when they are reviewing services.
- The Challenge Cards have created an additional feedback mechanism between young people and the formal structures.

STANDARD 4

STAFF

LILAC STANDARD  NOT ACHIEVED

Staff are expected to support and contribute to practice and policy on the active involvement of children and young people in services that affect them.

Why Kent County Council did not meet this Standard:

At the time of the 2014 LILAC Assessment it was decided that Kent did not meet the requirements of this Standard. Whilst there have been developments in the last year we do not feel that the performance has developed sufficiently to change the view we had last year.

In two of the criteria under this Standard Kent meet the LILAC requirements. The authority has a well staffed and resourced Participation Team, including seven Apprentice Participation Workers, other staff and carers are enthusiastic about the need for young people to have their views heard. five of them have been in care. 61% of staff said that they know of young people being offered apprenticeships or work experience within the authority. The recent presentation by apprentices to the Challenge Group brought about 27 expressions of interest wanting to know how Council services can help with employability skills, including work experience and apprenticeship opportunities.

Our meetings with young people told us that young people still feel that their social workers change too often and that social workers are not as available and accessible as they would like. This was not a view of every meeting, the group of unaccompanied asylum seeking young people felt that they are well supported and cared for. Whilst the views we heard are anecdotal there was a consistent message. One young person has suggested that a “buddying” system for social workers would mean that young people have a second relationship if their social worker is unavailable or leaves.

Since last year there have been workshops for newly qualified social workers, led in part by the Apprentice Participation Workers. At the moment our survey showed that 49% of staff said that they had had training in participation, compare with 48% last year. If all new staff receive the new workshop this will increase and there are plans to embed Participation and Engagement workshops in to the staff core training programme. We would like to see more involvement of young people in care and care leavers in training for staff and foster carers. At the moment there is a reliance on the Apprentices.

Training in Participation and Involvement has been introduced on to the Foster Care Training Programme. This training will be held eight times between October 2014 and March 2015. However, this year 53% of foster carers said they have had training in participation compared with 70% last year.

STANDARD 4 STAFF

There is no mention in the Induction Policy of newly appointed staff receiving information about participation and no involvement of young people in the induction process. 40% of staff said that participation was included in their induction compared with 38% last year, 23% said young people were involved compared with 24% last year.

Young people are not currently involved in staff appraisal. In our meetings with staff no one said that young people have been involved in their appraisal. Our survey 9% said young people had been involved, the same as last year. The percentage of foster carers who said that young people have been involved in their appraisal fell from 60% to 47%.

LILAC 2014 recommendations

Explicitly set out young people's involvement in staff induction and on-going appraisal in the participation and induction policies.

Include the active participation of young people in all child care role descriptions.

Provide training for staff and foster carers on participation, delivered wholly or in part by care experienced young people. Make a regular programme of training available to all staff and foster carers. It's also a good idea to offer 'refresher' training to keep everybody up to speed.

Encourage young people to become co-trainers in programmes like Total Respect, or to become LILAC assessors and trainers.

Make more use of training resources led by young people, such as DVDs made by young people and create formal training packs.

- There still needs to be young people's input into job descriptions.
- The young people contribution to training of foster carers and staff is provided by the Apprentices. Opportunities should be extended to other young people.
- Plans to embed Participation and Engagement workshops into the staff core training programme should be implemented.
- Staff should meet young people as part of their induction.
- Consideration should be given to how the views of young people can be included in staff appraisals.

STANDARD 1

SHARED VALUES

LILAC STANDARD  ACHIEVED

The local authority adopts shared values that enable children and young people to be actively involved in services that directly affect them, including honesty about what can and cannot be changed and any limitations due to the organisation's responsibilities.

LILAC 2014 recommendations

Young person-friendly posters of Kent's Children's Services' Mission Statement and Pledge should be displayed in all centres, quoting UNCRC Article 12.

LILAC assessors felt both children's guides for fostered children was too informative and needed to be more child friendly, a revamp is needed with input from children and young people in designing and with the text. Furthermore, social workers should explain the children's guide at regular intervals with the children and young people.

- We saw posters of the Mission Statement and Pledge in all the KCC buildings we visited.
- A revised children and young people's guide to fostering is available on the kentcares town website. The language and layout is attractive and should be accessible to young people.

STANDARD 5

RECRUITMENT & SELECTION

LILAC STANDARD ACHIEVED

Children and young people should be involved in the recruitment and selection of all staff and carers who will work with them or be responsible for them.

In the year since the last assessment young people have been more involved in recruitment through the interviews for a new intake of social workers this year. There is an ongoing increase in the recruitment of young people to “The Recruit Crew” to make sure young people will be available without the task being concentrated on a few young people. 66% of foster carers and 37% of staff said that young people had been involved in their recruitment.

LILAC 2014 recommendations

Implement a peer mentoring programme structure to involve and train young people in recruitment and selection and ensure a broad range of young people are involved.

- There has not been progress with developing a peer mentoring programme for young people involved in recruitment, though Apprentices support other young people on a group or individual basis.

STANDARD 6

CARE PLANNING & REVIEW

LILAC STANDARD  ACHIEVED

Children and young people should feel involved in the decision making that affects their lives and all decisions about them should be fully explained. All decision making, planning and review processes should be easily understood.

Comparison of the young people survey results in 2014 and 2015

Question	2014	2015
Do you know why you are in care?	88%	92%
Do you know what your care plan is?	80%	72%
Did you help write it or agree it	70%	53%
Do you think it reflects your wishes and feelings?	70%	65%
Do you feel you had a choice in which school you go or went to?	71%	72%
Do you feel you have had a choice over which placement you have?	71%	72%
Do you usually attend your reviews?	82%	82%
When you do attend, are you able to say how you really feel in them?	80%	78%
Do you feel listened to at your reviews?	80%	78%
Do you get a say in how your review is run?	60%	60%
Do you know who your IRO is?	75%	75%

LILAC 2014 recommendations

Consideration should be given to finding ways for all children and young people including children with disabilities to be able to fully participate in their reviews.

Consider engaging a care experienced Peer Volunteer Mentor in Kent County Council to help children and young people understand why they are in care and the importance of being involved in plans affecting their lives and their future.

We were told of various communication methods and techniques that are now being used to help young people with disabilities and communication difficulties have more involvement in their reviews.

Apprentices are available to give individual support to young people to understand why they are in care.

STANDARD 7

COMPLAINTS & ADVOCACY

LILAC STANDARD  ACHIEVED

Children and young people should know what to do if they are not happy with the way they are being treated and feel that their complaint will be listened to and treated seriously. Children and young people should have access to an advocate if they wish and the Authority should promote the advocacy service. They should receive feedback on the process and outcome of their complaint and support in coming to terms with the decision.

Comparison of the young people survey results in 2014 and 2015

Question	2014	2015
Have you ever seen or been told about how to make a complaint about your care?	88%	92%
Would you feel safe about making a complaint without it causing problems for you?	80%	72%
Has anyone explained to what an advocate does?	70%	53%
Has anyone told you how to contact an advocate does?	70%	65%

LILAC 2014 recommendations

Allow the Children in Care Council to review the issues that are raised with the complaints and advocacy team and use this information to inform their work to have an influence on the actions taken.

Develop further ways of involving the children and young people in some form of campaign to raise awareness of this service in a variety of ways e.g. posters, postcards or flyers, or website. This would stimulate interest and explain the advocacy service better, perhaps raise the profile of advocates, the Independent Reviewing Officer and other relevant information.

Complaints and advocacy issues should be brought to team meetings so that problems or issues do not reoccur and so that no one misses out on valuable information.

Information on complaints and advocacy should be made available in languages that children and young people from minority ethnic backgrounds, and children with learning disabilities can understand or have utilised on their behalf.

A Peer Volunteer Mentoring project on advocacy would help children and young people to understand advocacy specifically and raise awareness generally.

We are unsure as to how far these recommendations have been implemented.

FINALLY

A National Voice would like to thank all the young people, staff and elected members who took the time to meet with us and to complete questionnaires. Our time in Kent was well organized and the views expressed honest and constructive. Good luck in the future.



