Somerset Council

Somerset Care Councils

Autummn 2025

SiCC & SLCC Newsletter

Somerset in Care Council & Somerset Leaving Care Council

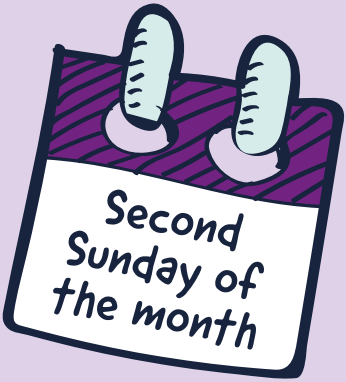
www.somersetincarecouncils.org.uk

Who are SiCC and SLCC?

SiCC & SLCC stands for the Somerset In Care Council and the Somerset Leaving Care Council. We ensure that the voices of children looked after and care leavers are included within the planning and reviewing of services.

If you would like to join SiCC and SLCC, if you have an idea for an article or have some artwork that you'd like to include in the next issue of the newsletter email **somersetincarecouncils@somerset.gov.uk**

Dates for the Diary!!



SiCC and SLCC meet in person on the **second Sunday of each month**.

Meetings are from **11.00am – 3.30pm** and we provide lunch.

The next core group meeting dates are:

- **12 October**
- **8 November**
- **14 December**

"Being a new member has opened me up to new opportunities which I didn't know existed and how welcomed the group made me feel and how supportive they were about my contributions.**"**

Somerset Council

The Somerset Care Councils NEED YOU!

We want to hear your views on things that matter to you, so come and join us!

Who are we?

Any young person in care or leaving care is automatically a member of SiCC and SLCC. We meet in person and online.

What do we do?

We meet monthly to help support the creation, review and updating of the services that we use. This includes creating films and animations, reviewing services, interviewing new staff, mystery shopping and the use of art, music & spoken word to have your voice heard.

Visit the Somerset In Care Councils Website at:
www.somersetincarecouncils.org.uk

To find out more, please email the team
somersetincarecouncils@somerset.gov.uk

Or complete our online form
https://tinyurl.com/SiCCandSLCC

Somerset children in care's incredible achievements, courage and resilience celebrated

The efforts and achievements of more than 430 Somerset children looked after and care leavers have been celebrated at this year's Annual Achievement Awards.

Children and young people were recognised for their efforts through nominations from social workers, foster carers, leaving care workers, schools and other Children's Services professionals.

The event took place at Bridgwater and Albion Rugby Football Club on Thursday 24 July. It was organised by the Somerset Council Engagement and Participation team and hosted by members of the Somerset in Care and Leaving Care Council (SiCC & SLCC) who welcomed guests, made speeches and presented awards.

Members of SiCC and SLCC and the Somerset Council Engagement and Participation team at the 2025 Annual Achievement AwardsChildren and young people nominated for awards were split across two age groups, juniors aged 0-12 years, and seniors aged 13+ and were commended across five categories:

- Personal Achievement – showing resilience or personal development.
- Positive Pastimes – doing well in sport, music, social, arts or leisure activities.
- Education, Training and Employment – Virtual School Award for achievements at school, college, in training or work.
- Helping Others – helping or making a difference to other people.
- Courage – being brave in dealing with personal illness or tragedy or helping and supporting those around them.

Nominations were anonymised and reviewed by a panel, who selected the winner of each category. Winners and nominees, along with their guests, were invited to attend, collect their awards, and have their achievements celebrated.

Workers and teachers were also commended at the event, with young people nominating the adults that work with them, with 20 nominations received across three categories.

One member of SiCC & SLCC said:

> "This day is about celebrating what we've overcome, what we've achieved, and showing the world who we really are. These awards mean a lot, because they come from people who've walked beside us and seen our journey. We're proud of each other, and we're proud of ourselves."

One foster carer said:

> "Thank you for such a lovely afternoon. Our young people had such fun, enjoyed the toy table, and absolutely loved all the kind attention shown to them, especially the opportunity to choose music to dance to at the very end! They have their certificates proudly displayed in their room and they were happy and cheery all afternoon."

Cllr Heather Shearer, Somerset Council Lead Executive Member for Children, Families and Education, said:

> "It's always heartwarming to see the bond between foster carers and the children they support. Events like the Annual Achievement Awards really shine a light on that connection, whether it's their first time or they've supported many children over the years, carers pour so much into each child. I'm incredibly proud of them all.
>
> "We are always in need of more foster carers, so do take a look at our website or contact us to find out more. You can really feel the joy, the love, and the sense of belonging that fostering brings here today."

SiCC and SLCC is a way for children looked after or care leavers to have a voice about the things that matter to them and help shape the services that they use. To find out more about SiCC and SLCC visit **www.somersetincarecouncils.org.uk** or email: **somersetincarecouncils@somerset.gov.uk**

Homes and Horizons Visit

Chloe and Ryan from SLCC were invited to visit a new home for children and young people in care in Ilminster.

Chloe and Ryan were involved in commissioning Homes 2 Inspire several years ago in order to provide high spec care homes for Somerset young people. Now, Homes 2 Inspire (part of the Shaw Trust) are working in a 3-way partnership with Somerset Council and the NHS Foundation Trust.

The members met with the building Manager Jess and had a tour of the home, along with local councillors. The members were impressed with the quality of the décor and the thought and consideration that had clearly gone into the preparation work. They were happy and excited for the young people who'll be moving in soon. Both Chloe and Ryan have had positive experiences of staying in care homes themselves, but they could appreciate that Homes and Horizons went the extra mile to offer residents the opportunity to feel valued and invested in.

Ryan said:

"Through these types of homes, I hope young people will feel they have the confidence and power to speak up and the home staff will also provide those opportunities. You can see the care that's been put into H&H homes from the look and the feel. It's so important that children and young people in care, aren't put at a disadvantage and don't feel 'left behind' or embarrassed because they're seen as 'poor orphans'. Homes and Horizons seem to go above and beyond to help them push through so many barriers, regarding their own confidence and the assumptions made by other people generally."

Somerset Council

Do you want to know more about Somerset Council's Youth Voice Groups?

Do you want to make some real change to the services in Somerset that you use?

We are excited to announce that we will be offering two virtual drop-in sessions which will aim to support you and the adults that work with you to understand the opportunities for children and young people to share their voice and experience to support services and improve them across the county.

The first session is for **Internal Colleagues/Partners and Professionals – Friday 26 September 2.00-3.00pm**

Click here to join the meeting

The second is for **Children and Young People (with support of carers/parents) – Monday 29 September 6.00-7.00pm**

Click here to join the meeting

If you have any questions, please get in touch **participationmailbox@somerset.gov.uk**

Young People Sit on Interview Panels

Over the last month some members of our Participation Groups, Kira (Somerset in Care and Leaving Care Council – SiCC and SLCC) and Abi (Youth Parliament Advisory Group), Chloe (SiCC and SLCC) and Elected Member of Somerset Youth Parliament James all volunteered to represent young people by sitting alongside Somerset Council managers on a panel to interview candidates for a variety of posts.

All four members took part in interview skills training and pre-interview preparation. This involved:

- Understanding equalities, bias and fairness
- 'Do's and don'ts' of interviewing candidates – etiquette, consistency and respect
- Expectations of candidate answers and behaviours
- Evaluation processes
- Chloe and James holding their certificates for their work sitting on interview panels

In addition, each member read through the Job Descriptions, identifying areas of these job roles where their key responsibilities aligned with specific areas of interest to young people, then they set about creating questions to ask candidates, as part of the interview panel.

On the interview days, members worked with the managers to read CV's and personal statements.

Member of SiCC and SLCC, Chloe said:

"I was really proud to be a part of these interviews. They are something that young people – especially in the care system – should have a say in, because candidates could be working with them and getting to know them."

"It was also good to get solid, positive feedback about how I delivered information and views during the interviews. I'd love to do it again."

Member of SiCC and SLCC, Kira said:

"I've never had interview training before and I kind of knew 'it'- but didn't actually realise it – if that makes sense! It really did help. And it was nice to get a certificate and be recognised for our help.

I really enjoyed being part of the interview panel. It means a lot to be trusted with a responsibility and to sit alongside the adult panel in helping to choose someone for the role. It's very empowering and I can definitely say it boosted my confidence."

Rachel Bovingdon, Somerset Council Service Manager Safeguarding Care and Quality Assurance said of SiCC and SLCC and Youth Parliament:

"I really enjoyed interviewing with members of SiCC and SLCC and Youth Parliament – they were both professional and fair. They contributed to the final decision on who should be appointed in the role and helped us understand who would work well in the service that they are a part of. The two questions they created were thought provoking and they delivered the questions with such etiquette. I felt proud being alongside them, knowing that they are part of young people's voice."

Somerset Youth Parliament

Somerset Youth Parliament is our local, official Universal Youth Voice Group, which represents the views and voices on a national platform of all Somerset young people aged 11-18 years. The group develops campaigns, take part in consultations, interviews, presentations, promotions and contribute to planning.

For more information on Somerset Youth Parliament or to join, visit **https://somersetyouthparliament.org.uk/**

What does SiCC and SLCC mean to its members?

Recently members of SiCC and SLCC have been reflecting on what being a part of the group means to them. They have been asking themselves what made them join and what they've gained by being a part of the group. What they've had to say has been really powerful.

Why did you join SiCC and SLCC?

"I joined SiCC and SLCC to make services better and use my tricky experiences for something good, but I can truly say being part of SICC and SLCC has changed my life." – Kira

"I joined SiCC and SLCC because I have lots of experiences and I want what's best for all young people out there!" - Leah

"I joined SiCC and SLCC because I wanted to be part of something meaningful, a group where young people from different backgrounds could come together to make real change. I've always felt that everyone deserves to have their story heard and I wanted to help make sure that happened. I joined because I believe in the power of youth voices and in creating space for people to speak up, be listened to, and be taken seriously.

Since joining, I've seen so many positive changes take place, both within the group and in the wider community. Whether it's helping shape decisions, raising awareness or being part of important conversations, I'm proud to say I've been a part of that progress.

It's shown me just how much we can achieve when we work together with passion and purpose." – Amber-Jane

"I joined SiCC and SLCC because I wanted to use my experience and voice to help others and try to make the future brighter for everyone." – Ryan

What have you gained from being a member of SiCC and SLCC?

"SiCC and SLCC came to my attention at a time that I wasn't quite ready to engage yet. At this point of my life I found everything in my world so hard to manage, and often felt like all my voice consisted of was shouting into a void filled with professionals and a lack of choices in my own life. Even though I wasn't ready just yet, I stayed on the radar of the participation team and they always held out hope for me. At the time I wondered whether it was worth joining, as I felt nowhere else in my life listened, so how would this be different?

I have always felt extremely passionate about making change in the systems that hadn't got it right for me, but was disillusioned by being caught up between so many agencies which were supposed to be for me but never worked with me. Although saying this, my leaving care worker was extremely instrumental in encouraging me to join and I am so thankful for that to this day considering the impact it has had on my life.

I eventually decided I would give it a go in the best way I could at the time, as even though I felt my voice got lost in my own care and support, I still really wanted to make a difference. I didn't know what that looked like yet but I knew from what I'd been through that change in the system was needed and that I may have experiences and perspectives that through sharing them could enable that to happen.

Due to my experiences through school and life I found other young people a bit scary at times, so when I first joined I was very reserved, I stayed on teams calls with my camera off and mic muted. Despite this, the workers involved with SiCC and SLCC still championed me and met me where I was at that time and showed me I had a voice, and the other young people were very understanding of that and so kind.

For the first time in my life I felt truly listened to, and I realised my voice was valuable and that I could use it to make real lasting change. When I explain to people now that I started out in SiCC and SLCC so anxious, nervous and quiet I think they find it hard to believe. Being shown that my voice matters has rippled out into all other areas of my life, and has helped me in more ways than I could have ever imagined.

Going from quietly being in the background so wanting to engage but being scared to, having a very tough time in my life outside of the group - to having opportunities like doing such groundbreaking work that we ended up traveling to London to win a national award as a group, sitting on interview panels, being involved with amazing projects and having a space where I can share my experience of the care system with such amazing other young people who just get it, we lift each other up and share that same desire to make groundbreaking change - and actually carry it out too." – Kira

"On a personal level, being part of SiCC and SLCC has helped me grow in so many ways. I've become more confident in myself and in my ability to speak out and share my thoughts. I've also discovered one of my new favourite things, writing newsletters! It's something I now really enjoy because it allows me to tell stories, highlight important topics and connect with others through writing.

But beyond all of that, one of the most special parts of this journey has been the friendships I've made. I've found some truly amazing friends through this group, people who understand me, support me and inspire me.

It's made such a difference to be surrounded by others who care about the same things and are just as passionate about making a change. I've grown, achieved more than I expected, and most importantly, I've found a community that believes in each other. I'm proud of everything we've done.

Being part of SiCC and SLCC has changed me for the better. It's shown me the impact young people can have when we're given the space to lead and support each other. I'm proud to be a part of this group, and I'm excited to keep making a difference - one story, one voice and one change at a time."
– Amber-Jane

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Chloe Interviewed by the BBC about Homes and Horizons Project

Chloe, member of SiCC and SLCC, was interviewed by the BBC about the Homes and Horizons project and the opening of the eighth children's home in Somerset.

Somerset Council has opened its eighth 'family style' children's home from some of the most vulnerable children in its care, as part of the Homes and Horizons partnership project between Somerset Council and Homes2Inspire.

SiCC and SLCC have been a part of this project from its very beginnings, where the group helped to choose the names of the homes, supported the interviewing of new staff, helped with decisions on decorating and furnishing the homes, as well as meeting the residents of new homes to help reduce their anxieties.

Chloe has volunteered on the project from its development phase and had this to say about her approach to the homes:

> "When a young person comes in they want to make this their home, they want to feel safe in this house – if I can't say I would want to move in here, it's not going to work."

To read more about the opening of the newest Homes and Horizons home, as well as the contributions of SiCC and SLCC, read the BBC article: **https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ccqjy07q90kgo**

Smokefree Somerset

Vaping

It's a quit tool not a cool tool

If you don't smoke, don't vape

Young people who vape may experience the following side effects:

Shortness of breath | Coughing | Headaches | Dry mouth | Sore throat

The long-term effects are still unknown.

Most vapes contain nicotine, a highly addictive drug that's easy to get hooked on and hard to stop.

Myth Busting: Vaping doesn't relieve stress, it can actually increase stress and anxiety. Nicotine withdrawal may cause irritability, sleep problems, and trouble concentrating.

Vaping is only recommended as a quit tool for adults who smoke, and it is illegal for nicotine vapes to be sold to anyone under 18 years old.

For more information on vaping, support to quit, and managing stress, scan the QR code or visit:
www.smokefreesomerset.org.uk

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