



Children and Family Services **Voice Strategy 2016-2018**

“She was the first worker who really listened to what I had to say. She wanted to know what was important to me and my kids. I knew what I had to do in order to make our lives better. I can’t thank her enough”

Quote from a Parent (April 2016)

Leicestershire County Council is committed to listening, hearing and responding to the voice of children, young people and their families. We know from experience that this gives a vital insight into people’s lives and is crucial in developing services which meet their needs.

Children and Family Services can play a significant role in enabling, capturing and where required being a champion for the voice of children and their families. In order for the process to work properly, there needs to be investment and commitment from every member of staff and listening to families must be seen as a key element of accountability.

In order to demonstrate this commitment the CFS Departmental Strategy includes the need to ‘listen and respond to service user voice’ as a key priority.

What do we believe?

Everyone is unique and can therefore offer a unique viewpoint

- *The views of children, young people and families should be respected, recognising that they have a right to be involved in decision making*
- *Children and Young People have a responsibility to engage in decisions that are important to them*

Professionals, services, organisations and communities should listen, act upon and reflect themselves on the views of children, young people and families in order to achieve the best outcomes

What do we aspire to do?

- Listen, hear and respond to children and families in all aspects of our work
- Raise awareness of the right for children, young people and families to be involved in decision making
- Champion the needs, wishes & aspirations of children, young people and families at all levels
- Involve, support and empower children, young people and families to participate
- Ensure that voice work happens naturally, not as an add on
- Reinforce the principle that children and families should be at the heart of everything we do
- Involve children, young people and families in an ethical and meaningful way

Why do we need to listen, hear and respond to families?

We know from previous experience that involving children, young people and families in decision making can bring real benefits. These include benefits to them, benefits for organisations, and benefits for communities (see Appendix 1).

In addition, children and young people have a right to be involved. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 12 states that:

“Children have a right to say what they think should happen, when adults are making decisions that affect them, and to have their opinions taken into account”

As can be seen from statutory guidance, legislative requirements and new initiatives (see Appendix 2) the importance of listening to service users continues to be nationally recognised.

Principles of Involvement:

The following principles have been taken from previous strategies and include more recent views of parents, children, young people and professionals

Principles:

1. We will use a rights based approach – remembering that children’s rights are not limited to procedural matters or legislated requirements
2. Children and families will feel safe and supported during voice work activities
3. Opportunities to listen to families will be creative, flexible, accessible and inclusive
4. Opportunities will be varied, enjoyable & meaningful for children, young people and families in order enable them to be heard in ways which suit them
5. Resources will be in place to support listening to children and families

6. We will be honest with children and families
7. We will give clear and simple feedback saying what has happened as a result of them being heard
8. We will provide opportunities for children, young people and families to raise their own issues and initiate their own ideas

The Developing Approach in Leicestershire

Leicestershire has remained committed to creating a culture of listening to children and families and believes that this should be a bottom up approach in order to really improve outcomes for families.

Voice work has developed considerably across the children and families department over recent years. Good practice examples include:

- Children In Care Council – Well established CIC groups which have direct links to decision makers at a local, regional and national level
- UKYP/CYCLe – A strong youth council which enables young people to be heard on matters which are important to them
- Parent voice within the Children’s Centre programme, including the use of mystery shoppers to quality assure the programme
- Participation work for Young Offenders
- Our first CFS Voice Festival Week which included staff training and development opportunities
- Families enabled to influence the Local Offer (SEND Agenda)
- A total of five Voice Pop Ups delivered across the county which have enabled families to influence the design, delivery and evaluation of services
- A Quality Assurance & Improvement Framework (QAIF) has been adopted across the department. The framework will support improvement on what we do, how we do it and what we achieve in terms of outcomes for children and young people. QAIF provides a structured and systematic approach to improve practice and services across the department by reinforcing cycles of improvement and the necessary change in culture. Information collected through improvement activity forms an evidence base for the self-evaluation of services, and strategic direction of the department. Capturing voice is an integral part of QAIF and underlies all improvement tool activity
- Investment in the Signs of Safety approach has enabled staff to place children at the heart of their work

Where are we going?

A key element of the voice strategy is an action plan which supports its implementation. The action plan will include the following priorities:

Priority 1 – We will ensure that the views of children and families are heard at all levels. We will do this by:

- Further promotion of the Voice Inbox in order to embed a more systematic approach to capturing the views of children and families and acting on them
- Continue to develop an evidence base in terms of what families tell us works, making sure that voice can influence across the department
- Ensure that Children and Families have relevant access to decision makers in order to influence future service delivery, including other arrangements such as Healthwatch and the LSCB
- Empower children and families to have their voice heard, in ways which suit them
- Evaluate and celebrate the impact of voice work
- Empower children and families to be heard at both a regional and national level using mechanisms such as British Youth Council and direct work with government departments and initiatives
- Carrying out regular thematic consultations i.e. mental health, domestic abuse
- Ensure families are aware of what has changed as a result of their involvement
- Ensuring the wider Leicestershire County Council Transformation Programme is linked into Departmental voice activities
- Supporting the Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children's Board plan for the engagement of children, young people and families

Priority 2 – We will ensure that the workforce has the tools, skills and expertise to effectively listen and engage children and families in decision making. We will do this by:

- Supporting managers to plan voice work effectively and demonstrate impact
- Create “Listening to younger children training” and e-learning module for Voice Work
- Continue to develop our voice resources, utilising the role of the network to ensure inclusivity
- Continue with the CFS Strategic Voice Group including developing more effective links with local partner agencies
- Continue with the Growing Safety project
- Continued use of Family Star to ensure families are heard in assessment and planning

Priority 3 – We will ensure that our voice work is inclusive. We will do this by:

- Celebrating and sharing good practice across the Voice Network
- Provide a wide range of resources to practitioners to ensure that voice work is creative and accessible
- Carrying out specific consultations/voice activity as required including the use of “Mini Pop Ups” Carrying out specific work in relation to Younger Children, Young Carers and Disabled Children
- Implement recommendations from the “Listening to Younger Children: Regional Participation Leads Group Report” (Nov 2014)

How will we measure success?

The CFS strategic Voice Group will be responsible for the monitoring and evaluation of the strategy and will report its findings directly to the Improvement Board.

Methods used to monitor voice will include:

- QAIF
- Case Audits
- Departmental Voice Audits
- Family journeys/Case studies
- Evaluation work with children, young people and families e.g. Young Inspectors, mystery shopping
- Specific thematic consultation and evaluation exercises as required
- A common template for ‘You Said, We Did’ which all teams will be asked to report on

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Benefits:

Experience shows that involving children, young people and families in decision making brings these benefits.

Benefits for child/young person/family

- A better understanding of how organisations work and therefore how to influence them
- More effective services designed with their needs at the heart of any changes
- Resilience, confidence building and ambition through the empowerment brought by being involved
- Influence over decisions that are important to them
- Opportunity to model good practice in relation to listening effectively

Benefits for services/organisations:

- A real insight into the lives of children, young people and families that can only otherwise be assumed
- The ability to understand family's own priorities and needs and their own solutions to their issues or concerns
- A wealth of information for informing need and future service development
- New perspectives and fresh ideas about services, policies and procedures
- Services which are fit for purpose, therefore saving money and avoiding duplication

Benefits for communities:

- Fostering of community cohesion through the inclusion of children, young people and families in local decision making
- An empowering environment that raises aspirations among children, young people, their families and the wider community
- A more vibrant local democracy through the active involvement of children and young people

Appendix 2 – National & strategic drivers:

There continues to be a wide range of national and international drivers that make it essential that children, young people and their families are actively involved in decisions that are important to or have an impact on them. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 12, states that:

- Every child and young person has the right to express his or her views freely – about everything that affects him or her.
- The child's or young person's views must be given due weight depending on his or her age and maturity.
- The child or young person has the right to be heard in all decision-making processes, including in court hearings. The child or young person can speak for him or herself, or someone else can speak for him or her.

Other more specific guidance/recommendations include:

- **The Munro report clearly recommended the need for the inspection framework to;**

Examine the child's journey from needing to receiving help, explore how the rights, wishes, feelings and experiences of children and young people inform and shape the provision of services, and look at the effectiveness of the help provided to children, young people and their families.

- **Ofsted inspections will include;**

The extent to which the views and experiences of children, young people and their families are at the centre of service design and influence development and strategic thinking

- **SEND Guidance specifically states that;**

When making decisions about children with SEN or disabilities, your local authority must: have regard to the views, wishes and feelings of children, their parents and young people