**Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states: "Every Child or young person has the right to express his or her views on all matters that affect them and their views should be given due weight in accordance to their age and maturity."**

The UK has ratified the UN Convention, and as a Council we are required by law to take seriously the wishes, views and feelings of children and young people. The full participation, involvement and contribution of children who have received Early Help and Children’s Social Care interventions (including care leavers and unaccompanied asylum seeking children) is crucial.

KCC is committed to listening to children and young people about their experiences of the services that they receive and the issues that are important to them; and to work with them to deliver improvements that reflect their views.

**This work centres on promoting positive outcomes for vulnerable children and young people.**

To achieve this, participation and engagement activities must mean listening to children and young people, and talking to them about the services they receive and their wishes and feelings. And recording what they tell us and what we observe. Purposeful visiting: discussing the care plan; asking them what is worrying them; what they think needs to get better; taking part in reviews and conferences, etc.

Meaningful participation and engagement activities also encompass a range of capacity-building opportunities for children and young people including formal accreditation, training, confidence-building, work experience and/or development of new skills.

**Participation**

**Participation is the process of involving children and young people in decision making.**

Participation can happen in lots of different ways, for example, group discussions, questionnaires, individual conversations, art based projects and many more.

Respecting children's views means that such views should not be ignored; it does not mean that children's opinions should be automatically endorsed. Expressing an opinion is not the same as taking a decision, but it implies the ability to influence decisions.

Your work with a child or young person must demonstrate and record a process of dialogue and exchange in which children assume increasing responsibilities and become active, tolerant and democratic. You must provide direction and guidance to children while considering their views in a manner consistent with the child's age and maturity. Through this process, the child will gain an understanding of why particular options are followed, or why decisions are taken that might differ from the one he or she favoured.

All participation must influence what we do and how we do it as a local authority.

**Consultation**

**Consultation is the process of listening to and gathering children and young people's views.**

**Consultation is seen as one method of participation in involving children and young people in decision making.**

The child's participation is a right and children therefore are free to express their views or, if they prefer, to not do so.

Children should not be pressured, constrained or influenced in ways that might prevent them from freely expressing their opinions or leave them feeling manipulated.

In a manner consistent with the child's age and maturity, you must look for ways of creating the right atmosphere to enable the child to freely express his or her views.

Within age groups, the ability, confidence and experience of the individual child in assessing his or her own situation, considering possible options, expressing views and influencing decision-making processes will all have a bearing on how such an atmosphere can be achieved.

**Involvement**

**Involvement is used to describe any form of engagement with children and young people in Kent participation and/or consultation activities.**

**Good practice principles and our commitment:**

* Use a range of different methods to listen to children and young people on the matters that are important to them, and that affect them
* Communicate information and messages from children and young people to the relevant decision-makers
* Look for opportunities to be trained and supported to listen effectively to a diverse range of children and young people
* Ensure children and young people's involvement happens at the earliest possible stage of planning
* Show (record and report) evidence of the impact and influence of children and young people's participation
* Check with young people that they know what the impact and influence of their involvement is in their participation
* Give feedback to children and young people in a variety of formats and within agreed timescales e.g. through the Children in Care council.

If you don’t know about county-wide and local Children in Care Councils ask your manager, and ask if you can attend and take part.

If you get this right children and young people's experience of the participation process will be positive and empowering. Children and young people's views will be actively considered and incorporated in decision-making at all relevant levels. A diverse range of children and young people receiving early help and specialist children’s services will be involved in participation activities. The contribution of children and young people will be recognised and valued.

Participation activities give children and young people opportunities to try new things, to make friends, to develop their skills and to have fun. Ask around to see what goes on in your area, and take part.

Our Participation and Engagement Strategy (refreshed in May 2015) sets out the current levels of participation of children and young people in Kent, and their consequent influence on service design and delivery. The strategy then identifies priorities for further developing participation in Kent and mechanisms and structures by which this can be achieved. You should read it.

A Participation and Engagement Working Group holds monthly meetings, chaired by the AD Corporate Parenting and facilitated by the Participation Coordinator, and these will run over the next two years to consider the barriers that may prevent certain children and young people being involved and address these as best as possible. To discover and implement new and innovative ways to increase participation and engagement and improver outcomes for children and young people. If you are really interested in Participation and Engagement, over and above the day job, get in touch and you may be able to join this group.

**Participation and Engagement is what social work is all about. Understanding a child’s story (the chronology) and trying to understand what it’s like in that child’s shoes, and talking to children and young people about their past experiences and what their care plan is, and recording it well, are all things that Ofsted look for when they inspect us. More importantly they are all things that good social workers will do well.**

**Geoff Gurney**

**Interim Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting**

**July 2015**

**Email me if you found this procedure in a nutshell helpful.**