



Leicestershire Children and Family Service Voice and Influence Strategy

| 2020-23

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Foreword

Article 12 of The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child says every young person has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them and to have those views considered and taken seriously.

It is extremely important that young people get the opportunity to shape their own future, have a say on relevant things that affect them and that they are taken seriously. It will be us as young people who will be most affected by any political or local changes made. Lots of policies and services affect us already, and if they don't yet they soon will.

Putting the user of a service, the young person, at the centre of its design makes sure that it addresses their needs.

We are pleased that members of Youth Parliament and other young people have the opportunity to work with Children and Family Services to help to develop services for young people across Leicestershire with their best interests fully at heart.



Laurence, Dev, Harry and Stanley

Members of Youth Parliament for Leicestershire 2020

Introduction

The Voice and Influence Strategy sets out the vision and aspirations of the Children and Family Service for all Leicestershire’s children, young people and their families to participate and engage in the services that affect them. This strategy relates to children and young people from 0 to 18 and to care leavers and young people with disabilities up to the age of 25.

The Voice and Influence Strategy evidences Leicestershire County Council’s commitment to putting children and young people at the heart of all our activities through involving them and their families in the decision-making, planning, commissioning, design, development, delivery and evaluation of services that affect their daily lives.

The Voice and Influence strategy outlines what we will do to achieve a culture of engagement in which children, young people, their families and carers can ‘have a voice’ and can be heard at a time and a level that is right for them.

The Voice and Influence Strategy will be aligned to other key Children and Family Service strategies including our departmental Quality Assurance Framework.

“Allowing young people to shape services that will affect them means that they are tailored made to fit their specific needs because perhaps sometimes what an adult deems to be the best option or the best fit for their needs, isn’t.”

County Youth Council for Leicestershire

“It is important that we as young people are involved in shaping children’s services that affect us because the people that are in charge will not use the services and quite a lot of time they are out of touch whereas if we had say it would work better because we know our generation better”

County Youth Council for Leicestershire

“The voice of a young person is really important as we all have different viewpoints and can contrast with what adults think is the best for a young person. It’s crucial that we are listened to as young people can relate to each other’s experiences the most and understand what they feel needs to be done.”

Children in Care Council

“It is important that we as young people have a say on things that affect us and are taken seriously because we are the people that will be most affected so it is important that we have a say so that we can tell people our views and feelings and hopefully they will be acted on”

County Youth Council for Leicestershire

“If you want your services to be effective at handling and getting young people to access it then it needs to have a young person’s touch to help.”

Children in Care Council



What is Voice and Influence?

The Children and Family Service uses the term “Voice and Influence” to describe participation. ‘Participation’ is defined in terms of children and young people informing, influencing and shaping services. This definition is supported by Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to which the United Kingdom is a signatory. There are lots of different ways to define participation but, at the heart, it is all about being listened to and understood and includes:

- Having the opportunity to be involved in decision making
- Having a say in services that affect you
- Being able to influence and shape outcomes
- Being listened to and knowing what you say will be taken seriously
- Knowing what difference your views and ideas have made

Values and beliefs

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.

The Children and Family Service plays a significant role in enabling, capturing and, where required, championing the voice of children and their families. For the process to work properly, there needs to be investment and commitment from every member of staff.

Engaging with children and young people and giving them a voice is everyone's business. CFS believe that:

- The views of children, young people and families should be respected
- Children and young people have a right to be involved in decision making
- Every child and young person is unique and offers a unique viewpoint
- Services should listen and act upon the views of children, young people and families to achieve the best outcomes.



Our aims:

- To listen, hear and respond to children and families in all aspects of our work
- To involve, support and empower children, young people and families to participate
- To raise awareness of the right for children, young people and families to be involved in decision making
- To champion the needs, wishes and aspirations of children, young people and families at all levels
- To consider Voice as part of service planning and delivery
- To reinforce the principle that children and families should be at the heart of everything we do
- To involve children, young people and families in an ethical and meaningful way

We will achieve this by:

- Having a shared understanding of the importance of Voice
- Working within a framework of shared values, principles and standards
- Developing the skills and knowledge of our children's workforce on Voice
- Developing suitable tools to capture the views and voices of children and young people
- Evidencing how Voice is this is working and how we can maximise impact

National and Local Drivers

There are very clear laws stating children and young people should have a right to participate. Article 12 of The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child says every young person has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them and to have those views considered and taken seriously. The participation of young people is also enshrined in law in section 19 of the Children and Families Act 2014 and the Care Act 2014. In addition, our experience shows us that listening to and involving children, young people and families brings many benefits including:



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

A report by the Local Government Group and the National Youth Agency, “Valuing Young Voices, Strengthening Democracy” (2010) defines three variations of youth participation:

- Public participation: includes involvement in youth forums or councils, surveys, consultations or activities linked to quality assurance and improvement of services such as inspection, mystery shopping and involvement in recruitment.
- Social participation: defined as group activities that young people are involved in such as social action projects, where young people are motivated to improve their local area; volunteering, as both a one-off and an on-going activity; group fund-raising and support for charities or good causes; and participating in more generic social group and positive activities.
- Individual participation: this means engaging in a dialogue with individual children where services are provided, related to age and understanding, before significant decisions which affect them are made, and then to explain how and why particular decisions are made. This has particular relevance to children who are subject to corporate parenting but is applicable across the spectrum.

Our strategy aims to ensure children and young people have opportunities for meaningful participation across all three contexts with an emphasis on how their voices can have a meaningful impact on improving services and the quality of provision



Where are we now?

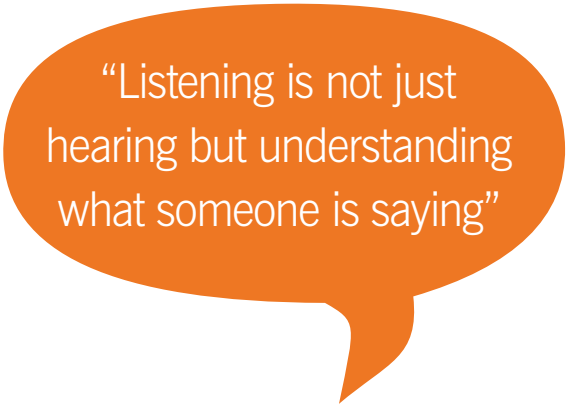
There are some well-established forums and processes already in place across the department that support children, young people and families to participate and voice work has been recognised as an area of strength in the department by Ofsted (Nov 2019). “The Children in Care Council (CiCC) and Supporting Young People After Care (SYPAC) group are an impressive assembly of children and young people who feel listened to and valued by the highly visible and effective lead member and other senior leaders”.

CiCC and SYPAC regularly participate in activity to ensure their voice is heard and represented in key service developments, including chairing Corporate Parenting Board meetings, recruitment to key posts across the department, involvement in Foster Carer recruitment and training and the development and launch of our “Promise” standards for children in care and care leavers.

Through our County Youth Council, Youth Campaign Group and Safeguarding Children’s Partnership Young People’s Advisory Group young people are able to engage directly with senior managers from the department, the wider council and partner agencies such as health and the police, to help to identify priorities, inform planning and to hold services to account.

We recognise that while opportunities for public and individual participation are well established across the department, broadening the cross-section of young people engaging to better reflect the diversity of Leicestershire and increasing opportunities for social participation are areas for further development and focus in the coming year.


- County Youth Council – Leicestershire (CYCLE) is a strong youth council which enables young people to be heard on matters which are important to them.
- Youth Parliament – young people are supported to stand as members of the youth parliament and to represent the voice of Leicestershire’s young people at regional and national conferences and events, including debates at the House of Commons
- Make Your Mark– young people are supported to take part in the National Youth Ballot to vote for members of Youth Parliament and to identify the topics that are of most interest to them to be discussed at Youth Parliament
- Youth Campaign Group – a sub group of the Children and Families Partnership Board facilitating young people to develop campaigns on issues raised by county young people through Make Your Mark. Young people are able to talk directly to senior managers across the partnership and influence strategic planning and decision making



“Listening is not just hearing but understanding what someone is saying”



“When I feel listened to I feel respected and cared for, it helps me to trust you with what I say”



“It’s my right to be heard and your job to explain that to me”



“My voice matters”

*Quotes from
Yasmin Allen / Young People’s Advisory Group
(LLR Safeguarding Children Partnerships)*

“When I’m not listened to it makes me feel like I don’t matter”

“Young people will be the decision makers of the future”

“Ask me what I want”

“It will make young people’s experience easier if people act on what’s important to us”

- Safeguarding Children’s Partnership Young People’s Advisory Group – young people are able to talk directly to senior managers across the partnership and influence strategic planning and decision making
- Children in Care Council (CiCC) – well-established junior and senior CiCC groups with direct links to decision makers at a local, regional and national level
- Supporting Young People After Care (SYPAC) – care leavers are able to talk directly to senior managers about the areas and themes most important to them and influence the service provided for our care leavers.
- Parent voice - within the Children’s Centre programme, including the use of mystery shoppers to quality assure the programme.
- Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings - all Looked After Children have the opportunity to have their voices recorded, heard and acted on three times annually. Over 1,200 of these meetings take place every year.
- Virtual School participation events - give Looked After Children further opportunities to speak to us informally about their interests, education and any other concerns
- Parent Carer Forum - enabling families of children with SEN and disabilities to be consulted on and influence service design and delivery, including the Local Offer
- Disabled Children and Specialist Teaching Services - utilise a wide range of skills and resources to support communication and the participation of children and young people, suited to individual needs
- Voice Pop Ups – targeted events delivered across the county which have enabled families to influence the design, delivery and evaluation of services
- Quality Assurance & Improvement Framework - provides a structured and systematic approach to improving practice and services across the department by reinforcing cycles of improvement and culture change. Capturing voice is an integral part of QAIF.
- Audit Cycle- a key part of the audit cycle is to capture feedback from service users and ensure this informs future service delivery and development.
- Signs of Safety – a unifying practice framework that supports staff to keep the voice of children at the heart of their work and actively promotes ‘working with’ rather than ‘doing to’ our children, young people and families.

Quotes from
Yasmin Allen / Young People’s Advisory Group
(LLR Safeguarding Children Partnerships)

What we will do

1 Resources

For this strategy to be effective it is crucial that it be resourced across the whole of the Children and Family Service, therefore we will implement an approach based on the East Midlands Regional Participation Best Practice Model (2019) to provide effective mechanisms for gathering, collating, analysing and sharing of voice.



2 Introduce an agreed participation model

We will introduce the Lundy model, a rights-based participation practice framework, to enable us to develop shared values, principles, standards and approaches across the department and ensure the children's workforce has appropriate resources and tools to support the necessary skills to effectively engage children and young people.



Figure 1 Lundy's Model of Participation as included in Ireland's National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020

We will ensure the four stages are considered in any formal participation groups, voice activity and direct work with individual children and young people.

3 Monitoring and review

The Voice Network and Strategic Groups will complete the "Hear by Right" mapping tool and use it to review the Voice and Influence Strategy and to inform the delivery plan for the following year. As part of the annual review it will be essential that the volume of participatory activity across the department, and its impact is mapped and understood.

Appendix 1

CFS Strategy Action Plan 2020 - 21

| Priorities | SMART Actions | When | Lead |
|---|--|----------------------|--|
| 1. Implement East Midlands Regional Participation Best Practice Model | 1.1 Implement and embed Voice Network Group with agreed terms of reference and representation from each service area | Jan 2020 | Quality, Performance and Voice Manager / Children and Families Partnership Manager |
| | 1.2 Implement and embed Voice Strategic Group with representation from key senior leaders | Jan 2020 | HoS - Early Help and Community Safety |
| | 1.3 Implement and embed alternate bi-monthly Voice Network Group and Voice Strategic Group meeting pattern | Jan 2020 on | Quality, Performance and Voice Manager / Children and Families Partnership Manager |
| | 1.4 Develop a shared Voice calendar to support co-ordination, planning and delivery of voice activity across the department | By Sept 2020 | Voice Network Group |
| | 1.5 Develop Voice action plans for each service area to be included in the annual service delivery plan | Sept 2020 | Lead Service Managers |
| | 1.6 Develop a voice communications plan to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal launch of the Voice and Influence Strategy and Voice Network • “You Said, We Heard, We Did” feedback to children, young people and families • Updates on Voice activity to wider department, Leicestershire County Council and partners | By Sept 2020 | Voice Network Group |
| 2. Introduce the Lundy participation practice framework | 2.1 Work with regional colleagues to identify training on the participation framework and to develop tools/materials to support implementation | Sept 2020 | Quality, Performance and Voice Manager / Children and Families Partnership Manager |
| | 2.2 Launch new participation framework and tools | Sept - Dec 2020 | Voice Network Group |
| | 2.3 Cascade training across the department (possibly virtually/e module) | Sept 2020 – Mar 2021 | Voice Network Group |
| | 2.4 Carry out a review of the impact/efficacy 12 months after launching | Sept 2021 | Voice Network Group |
| 3. Review Voice and Influence Strategy | 3.1 Voice Network and Strategic groups to use the “Hear by Right” tool to carry out an review of the Voice and Influence Strategy | Starting Sept 2021 | Voice Network & Strategy Groups |

