

Participation of Children and Young People

[DRAFT] Strategic Framework 2020 – 2023

Introduction and Context

Definition of Participation:

“Participation is the process by which individuals and groups of individuals can influence decision making and bring about change” (Adapted from Treseder P. 1997)

“I want to live in a place where I can grow up being healthy, happy and safe, where I can do well and have my voice heard” (Lancashire Young Person)

All children and young people have the right to have their views, wishes and feelings taken into account, when decisions are being taken about their life. These decisions could be about their family, school or life in the community. This right is protected under Article 12 in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This has been adopted into United Kingdom legislation, such as the Children’s Act 2004, and all services and agencies have a duty to comply with this right. The 'Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018)' guidelines state: *Anyone working with children should see and speak to the child; listen to what they say; take their views seriously; and work with them and their families collaboratively when deciding how to support their needs.*

Lancashire has a population of approximately 1,210,000, of which around 279,000 are children and young people aged 0 - 19. Of these children and young people 2,100 are classed as 'Children Looked After' and around 33,500 are from a Black and Minority Ethnic background. There are also approximately 24,000 children and young people aged 0 - 25 with Special Educational Needs and/or Disability.

Children and young people are often vulnerable for a range of reasons including poverty, disability, substance misuse, physical or mental illness, or because of other problems within the family home. This may include arguments and persistent conflict with or between parents or carers, abuse and neglect or living with the effects of other problems such as parental substance misuse, mental health problems or domestic abuse. Children in the most deprived neighbourhoods are more likely to have special educational needs.

It’s important that we acknowledge the role children and young people can play in shaping service delivery and design and bringing about positive change. This strategic framework does not set out the resources required to deliver our commitment. We need our partners to address the resourcing issue with us and to agree that the county council cannot be the sole contributor and funder. This strategic framework sets out our multi-agency commitment and approach to involving children and young people in all areas of decision making and in taking their views seriously.

Our Vision

Children, young people and their families are safe, healthy and achieve their full potential.

Strategic Priority

Children and young people are supported to influence decision making and bring about positive change for themselves and others.

Our Mission

To promote and protect the right of children and young people to have their views heard on the decisions that affect their lives and for their views to be taken seriously.

Our Values

Respect

- We respect the right of all children and young people to participate in decision making.
- We respect that participation activity is undertaken voluntarily.

Equality

- We listen to all children and young people, especially those least likely to be heard.
- We will provide creative support for children and young people to take the lead in participation activity.

Integrity

- We are open and honest with children and young people about what they are participating in and why.
- We will provide timely feedback to children and young people following participation activity.

Making a difference

- We will take the views of children and young people seriously.
- We will act upon what children and young people are telling us or explain why we can't.

Principles

1. We will ensure that all children and young people, especially those that are most vulnerable, are able to participate in decision making, if they choose to do so.
2. We will ensure a sufficient range of resources and incentives are made available to support the participation of children and young people.
3. We will ensure the children and young people's workforce acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to involve children and young people in decision making appropriately.
4. We will support children and young people to acquire the necessary skills to develop and deliver their own participation activity and social action projects.
5. We will provide accessible information and support, so that all children and young people can make informed decisions about their lives.
6. We will ensure that children and young people receive appropriate feedback about any decision making that they have been involved with.
7. We will respect the privacy of children and young people and not share their information without their permission, unless there is a legal duty to do so.
8. We will safeguard all children and young people when engaged in participation activity.

Strengths:

- A wide range of forums are available for children and young people to share their views
- Improved communication of participation activity and impact, through partnership working and sharing best practice
- Increased involvement of young people in the recruitment of staff and volunteers
- Improved participation and influence in care planning and review meetings
- A range of participation training is made available to agencies and children and young people – some of which is delivered by young people themselves
- Participation is increasing the confidence of young people, leading to enhanced self esteem
- Participation projects are being co-produced between children and young people and universities, ensuring an ethical approach to influencing service design and delivery
- Support services for vulnerable children and young people have been commissioned to ensure that they have access to advocates to speak on their behalf, if required
- Online tools have been made available e.g. 'Mind of My Own' App

Weaknesses:

- There is a need to ensure all staff and decision makers see participation as everybody's business, providing the partnership with a consistent approach to policy and practice
- There is a need to provide a range of appropriate children's rights training, for staff and young people, to ensure children's rights enhance decision making processes
- There is a need to ensure participation is child centred, ensuring all children have the right to participate in decisions regarding their lives
- There is a need to provide necessary tools and knowledge for staff, so that children and young people can inform decision making, regardless of their age or disability
- There is a need to provide additional resource to ensure that children and young people who are living 'out of county' have the same opportunities to influence decision making
- There is a need to ensure that services and agencies include participation activities in their business plans / strategies and allocate appropriate resource to deliver those activities
- There is a need to develop a central database to record participation activity and its impact and reduce possible 'consultation fatigue' for children and young people
- There is a need to develop clear authorisation routes for participation projects, to expedite the range of opportunities for children and young people to influence decision making
- There is a need for the various Boards and Committees to consider how they can make their meetings more accessible to children and young people, to increase their influence over service development and delivery

Opportunities:

- Building a network of 'Participation Champions' from a wide range of services/agencies – sharing resources/ideas/best practice
- Bringing young people together from different backgrounds to share experiences/ideas to improve the lives of all children and young people in Lancashire
- Increasing the opportunities for children and young people to initiate their own funded participation projects through the various forums and partnerships with universities
- Accessing specialist training for children, young people and workers to enhance their skills and relationships to co-produce innovative projects and influence service design
- Access to more creative approaches and opportunities for children and young people to articulate their views
- Increased showcasing and celebration of children and young people's creative projects
- The Children, Young People and Families Partnership Board and the further development of Lancashire's multi-agency Early Help Strategy, provides an opportunity to shape and deliver a coordinated multi-agency approach to participation

Threats:

- It is essential a 'culture of participation' is agreed and embedded across Lancashire, with consistent values and principles, to drive and deliver quality participation activity
- Given the size and scale of Lancashire, it is important to establish a consistent approach across localities and partner agencies, to increase ethical participation activity
- There is a need to broaden participation beyond statutory/targeted services, thereby increasing the range of children and young people engaging in forums/projects
- There is a need to prioritise capacity and resource to increase the opportunities for workers to develop and support creative participation projects
- There is a need to maintain the momentum away from mainly 'consultative' participation projects towards more creative 'collaborative' and 'child-led' participation
- It is important that the evidence of the impact of participation activity is monitored and externally 'tested' on a frequent basis. This will demonstrate the increasing range and quality of participation opportunities available to children and young people during inspections

Priorities:

Children and young people should be supported to influence decision making across all agencies and bring about positive change for themselves and others.

The following are the key priorities identified in order to achieve this:

1. Embed and champion participation in services/agencies at **all** levels, creating a culture of participation which in turn makes services more child-centred.
2. Ensure there is a planned, coordinated and ethical approach to participation, which influences local, regional and national decision making.
3. Build on established partnerships with schools, partners, universities and other local authorities, to maximise funding opportunities to innovate participation practice.
4. Strengthen the links between the various youth voice forums, to facilitate an increase in the range of children and young people engaging in participation and social action.
5. Identify and enhance the range of children's rights/participation training available to workers and children and young people and, where possible, accredit that training.
6. Share best practice and promoting the achievements of children and young people with staff and partners, the public and other children and young people.
7. Establish monitoring, reporting and recording systems to evidence participation and social action activity and its impact, from across the partnership.
8. Investigate and implement an external participation accreditation scheme, to validate the range and quality of participation activity and its impact, on a continuous basis.

Conclusion

The endorsement and implementation of the principles and priorities of this Strategic Framework, demonstrates to Lancashire children and young people that their role in influencing decision making is taken extremely seriously. The framework for participation will ensure that there is clear evidence of improved outcomes as a result of family participation and we will evidence where changes have been made as a result.