



Children and Young People's Participation Strategy



Foreword >>>



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cosima Towneley".

**County Councillor
Cosima Towneley
Cabinet Member for Children
and Families**

The voice of children and young people lies at the heart of everything we do.

It is important for those who use our services that this is the case; that they should have the space to express themselves, feel actively involved, listened to and able to influence the decisions that affect them must lie firmly alongside that aspiration.

When we speak of ‘children and young people’, what do we mean?

To clarify, we mean those of you aged 0-19 years old or up to 25 years old if you are a Care Leaver or have Special Educational Needs or a Disability, sometimes referred to as ‘SEND’.

Children and young people aged 0-19 years old make up almost 1 in 4 of Lancashire’s population. We want to recognise the contribution you make to our county, now and in years to come. One way to do this is for you to share

your experiences of our provision and for us to listen. We also need to hear from parents, carers and the wider family.

This strategy is for all services within Lancashire County Council, but particularly the ones that work directly with you, like our early help and social care teams. We commend this strategy to our partner organisations and hope it strengthens the voice of children and young people across the children’s system.

This strategy has been developed with the help of the professionals and partners who guide and support our work with you, the children and young people we support.

We hope this strategy will move us forward in our ultimate vision – that children, young people and your families are safe, healthy and achieve your full potential.





The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child



Our participation strategy is led by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child - Article 12 which states that **every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them and to have their views considered and taken seriously.**

Article 23 states that **a child with a disability has the right to live a full and decent life with dignity and, as far as possible, independence and to play an active part in their community.**



Our commitment to participation

Article 12 recognises your entitlement and ability to influence actions and decisions that affect you. When you take part and express yourself in decisions that affect you, are listened to, understood and your view is taken into account, this is often called **participation.**

If participation is to be effective, meaningful and long-lasting, it needs to be an ongoing process that we should develop together, rather than a one-off activity. It requires an ongoing commitment in terms of your contributions, staff time and funding.

We want to embed and champion participation in services at all levels, creating a culture of participation which in turn, makes our services more child and young person centred.



Our core values

In Lancashire, we have four core values that are important for how we work. These principles, and our commitment to how we will help you participate, are:

Supportive

- We will be clear and informative and communicate with you in a way you understand.
- We will involve you as early as possible. We will be clear about what can and can't change and the timescale for change. We will explain different options to you and give you time to think through your ideas.
- We will share as much information as we can with you and make our ways of working with you accessible, creative, age appropriate and fun!
- We will support all of our staff to understand what Participation is and develop the necessary skills and knowledge so that they feel confident to involve you in decision making.

Innovative

(working in different ways)

- We will ensure opportunities to participate are relevant to you and have a clear purpose.
- We will create space for you to have ideas yourselves about how we could work differently or how you could change things that matter to you.
- We will recognise the contribution you make to how we work and celebrate your achievements. *
- We will learn about and reduce barriers to you participating and help make it as easy as possible.
- We will continue to learn, challenge ourselves and develop our approaches and opportunities for you to participate.

Collaborative

(working together)

- We will explain to you that Participation is voluntary (you choose to be involved) and you will not be forced to. You can decide to stop participating if you wish.
- We will keep trying to involve all of you, even if that takes extra time or different approaches.
- We will not make assumptions about what you can and cannot do.
- We will find opportunities for you to take the lead, learn new skills, and develop your confidence.
- We want you to tell us when we do something well as well as helping us improve.

Respectful

- We will ensure you are treated with respect and take time to build a relationship with you first.
- We will help you feel safe to express your views clearly and honestly. We will not judge you if your view is different from ours. We will respect your privacy and not share your information without your permission unless we legally must do so.
- We will be accountable for the decisions we involve you in and will always seek to let you know the outcome. We will let you know how your participation has influenced the outcome.
- If you feel that you are not being listened to or understood or you disagree with a decision that is being made, we will encourage you to speak to the professional you know best. If this is not possible, speak to their manager or contact our Complaints Team. *

*Please see additional guidance as an appendix to this strategy

Credit: Listen-Act-Change – Council of Europe Handbook on children's participation and UN General Comment No. 12 (2009) The right of the child to be heard



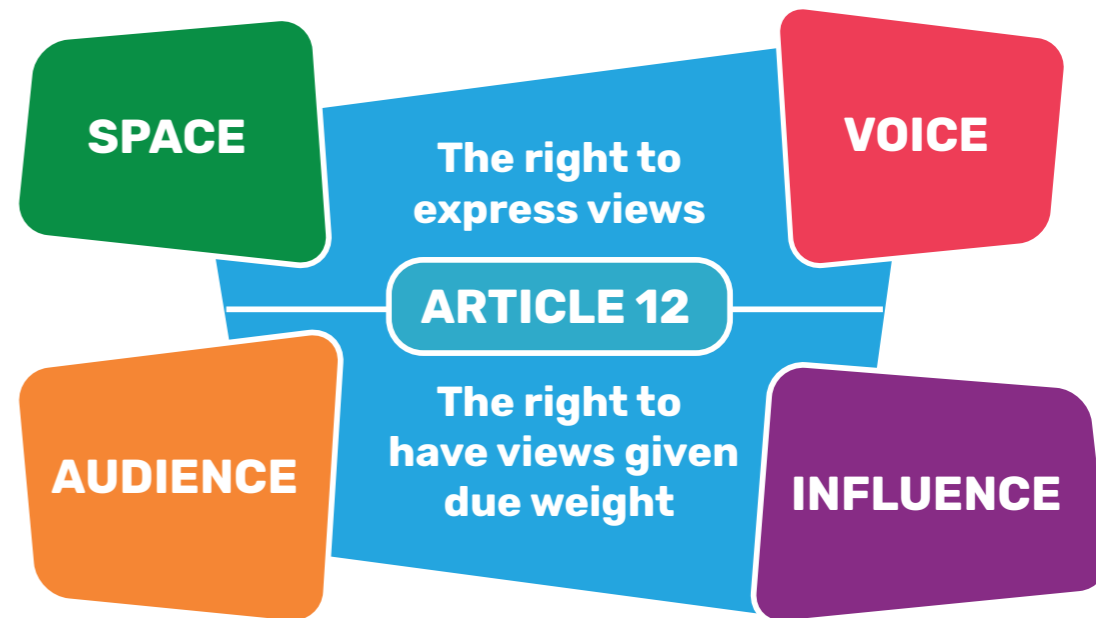
Models of participation

To explain participation in more detail, we have chosen the model below.

Sometimes, participation is explained using a ladder, where children and young people are making the important decisions at the top and working together with adults to influence change. We want to avoid being near the bottom of the ladder where you are not involved in decisions that affect your life and have no real understanding of what that means for you.

We need to be careful that we are supporting you to participate meaningfully and not saying one thing and doing something different (which can be called tokenism).

The model we have chosen in Lancashire was devised by Professor Laura Lundy. Lundy's model is a way of explaining Article 12 and is what's called a rights-based model of participation.



The model breaks Article 12 down into 4 elements which follow each other in order:

SPACE: Children must be given safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express their view.

VOICE: Children must be facilitated to express their view.

AUDIENCE: The view must be listened to.

INFLUENCE: The view must be acted upon, as appropriate.





What is important to remember is that adults recognise the importance of being able to capture the impact of influence that children and young people have had and let them know what difference their involvement has made. Sometimes that difference might be seen straight away but sometimes, participation can affect how adults understand children and young people's lives which might only make changes in the future. We need to ensure we are finding ways to capture, feedback and celebrate that impact and influence over time.



Checklist for the Lundy Model of Participation



INFLUENCE

HOW: Ensure that children's views are taken seriously and acted upon, where appropriate

- Were the children's views considered by those with the power to effect change?
- Are there procedures in place that ensure that the children's views have been taken seriously?
- Have the children and young people been provided with feedback explaining the reasons for decisions taken

VOICE

HOW: Provide appropriate information and facilitate the expression of children's views

- Have children been given the information they need to form a view?
- Do children know that they do not have to take part?
- Have children been given a range of options as to how they might choose to express themselves?

What matters to children and young people

SPACE

HOW: Provide a safe and inclusive space for children to express their views

- Have children's views been actively sought?
- Was there a safe space in which children can express themselves freely?
- Have steps been taken to ensure that all children can take part?

AUDIENCE

HOW: Ensure that children's views are communicated to someone with the responsibility to listen

- Is there a process for communicating children's views?
- Do children know who their views are being communicated to?
- Does that person/body have the power to make decisions?





Key language and definitions:

Some other key language and terms you might hear when you participate:

Consultative practices – this is where adults seek your views, then work with what you say to shape the outcome. It may be that some of your ideas are taken on board and others not, but this should be explained at the beginning of the process.

Co-production or Collaborative practices – this is where adults work with you in partnership. Usually, adults have the initial idea or issue, then involve you in what needs to change, what needs to be done and how.

This approach recognises that you have strengths, skills and experience that are just as valuable as those of adults or professionals.



Child-led practices – this is where you have the ideas or raise an issue important to you. Adults will then support you to develop your own projects, activities or support you to make changes you think are important.

Ideally we want to be moving towards more child-led practices and greater decision making involving you!



Hearing young people individually, operationally and strategically

We think it's important for you to understand that you can participate in different ways.

Individually - e.g.
Meaningful involvement in your support plan.



Individual

- Decisions relate directly to the participants' own lives.
- Decisions are made about day to day activities.
- Outcomes primarily impact the individual.

Operationally - e.g.
Delivering training, interviewing professionals, telling us how our services work or don't work for you.



Operational

- Decisions relate to planning, delivery and evaluation.
- The activity aims to improve the quality of service provision.
- Outcomes affect the individual and other service users.

Strategically – e.g.
Meeting with and influencing Elected Members, contributing to commissioning activities, having a seat on Partnership Boards.



Strategic

- Decisions relate to long term planning.
- The activity includes meaningful roles in priority setting, monitoring and designing services.
- Outcomes influence policy and practice.



Areas that you can influence

We want to think creatively about the areas of our work where you can participate and influence how we work. These might include:

- How our services work, how we evaluate what we do and how we measure our progress
- How we communicate with you
- How we recruit, train and supervise the staff that work with you
- The policies that we write and work by
- The services that we ask to deliver services to you on our behalf
- Our long-term strategic planning
- How we spend money

Benefits of participation

Benefits for you

- Build your confidence and self-esteem through being valued and appreciated
- Learn and develop your skills in problem-solving, communication and planning that will help you in the future
- Help keep you safe, as it increases trust and confidence that your voice matters and adults will listen to you
- Make new friends and meet different people
- See the difference you make in the community

Benefits for us

- We create services that are better at meeting your needs
- Contributes to building more effective, relevant and long-lasting public services
- It challenges us to make how we work more inclusive
- Strengthens accountability and being clear about what can and can't be achieved





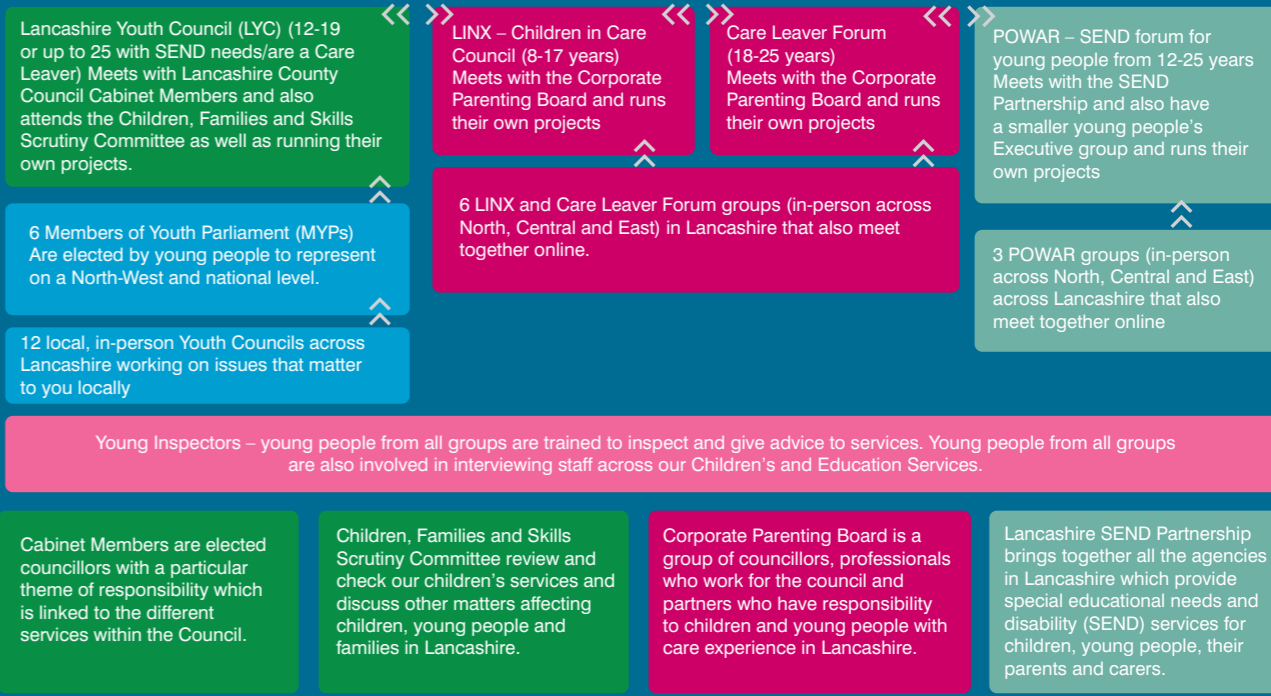
How can you get involved with participation groups?

There are a variety of groups that you could get involved in. If you are aged 12-19 (up to 25 with SEND or as a Care Leaver) you can access participation groups in your local area through our Youth Councils. You could also get involved in Lancashire Youth Council or be elected as a Member of Youth Parliament for the area you live. LINX (Listen, Involve, Negotiate, Xpress) is a group for those of you aged 8-17 years who are in our care, and we have a Care Leaver Forum for those of you who are 18 –25 years. POWAR (Participate, Opportunity, Win, Achieve Respect) is a group for those of you aged 12-25 years who have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

Depending on your interests, we would also encourage you to get involved in other projects. Our Culture Hacks volunteering initiative within libraries, museums and archives supports young people aged 11-24 to run inspiring activities of their own or you could join partners like LSCFT who have a Youth Voices programme themed around health issues.



Schools, youth groups, VCFS – all young people are welcome to join! Young people can also cross over and attend more than one group if they wish



How will we check that the strategy is working and what will success look like?

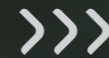
This strategy will be reviewed annually and report to the Children, Young People and Families' Partnership Board. Internally, how we work will be monitored by a Strategic Participation Group made up of representatives from different services.



We want our individual Children's and Education Services to use this strategy to inform how they work and we'll have a self-assessment and delivery plan which explains how we're going to improve. Our services will provide evidence of how they are improving and have opportunity to share what they are learning and doing well through Lancashire Participation Network.

Success in 12 months will look like...

- We will create a way of explaining this strategy visually so that you can understand it in different ways.
- A training programme has been developed and is accessible for all staff and children and young people.
- Our young people's participation groups are thriving. The number of young people attending these groups is increasing and the same young people want to stay involved in them.
- We want all Children and Education Services to have completed the self-assessment and understand their areas for development in their delivery plan and those of our partners.
- We will be gathering evidence of how children and young people are participating in our services and influencing change through regular case studies of practice.



Thank yous and credits

Thank you to young people from Chorley, South Ribble, Lancaster and Morecambe and Pendle Youth Councils, POWAR, LINX and colleagues from across Children's and Education Services for your input into this strategy.

Credit:

Lundy Model of Participation - Participation Framework National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making (Government of Ireland)
Leicester City Council (individual, operational, strategic diagram)
Listen-Act-Change – Council of Europe Handbook on children's participation

