

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Report

Panel:	Children and Families Advisory Panel
Date:	12 October 2021
Title:	Children and Families Participation Report
Report From:	Director of Children's Services

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Purpose of this Report

1. The purpose of this report is to give the panel an overview of participation activity in 2020. The report summarises the lessons learnt and makes recommendations for the direction of participation activity in 2021.

Recommendation(s)

2. The Panel is aware of and notes the participation activity that has taken place.

Executive Summary

3. The purpose of this report is to provide an overview and summary of participation activity within the Children and Families Branch in 2020.
4. Over the past two years, the focus of participation activity has been on engaging with families to strengthen relationships and ensuring that we are listening to what young people and their families want for their lives and their plans. This is now well embedded into districts and is monitored through activity including case file audits and care plan audits.
5. The period between January 2020 and December 2020 spans the period impacted by Covid-19 which brought new challenges for engagement with children and young people. Prior to this period, participation often involved conferences, forums, and large activity-based events; however, these had to be suspended in line with government guidance. Staff have sought other ways of creatively engaging with young people, balancing this against the additional pressure that the global pandemic has placed on them in performing their

statutory responsibilities. This report refers to this shift throughout the document.

6. During the first lockdown, participation activity focused on engagement with young people through fun and connection activities, which helped to support good relationships with young people while other methods of engagement could not take place. These included virtual quizzes, competitions, and videos of staff. As lockdowns continued young people appeared less inclined to meet staff online or undertake online activities, perhaps reflecting the widely felt “Zoom fatigue” phenomenon. Staff responded by continuing to offer creative methods of engagement, but this was a challenge.
7. Moving forward, as we come out of lockdown and return to ‘normal’, there is now an opportunity to review and refresh the 2018 – 2021 Participation Strategy. There is an opportunity to consider how we build on our engagement activity towards involving children and young people meaningfully in co-designing services and shaping service delivery. There have already been a number of opportunities for this to happen at a county and national level, which are detailed below under ‘Care Ambassador activities’. Care experienced young people have made valuable contributions on these occasions, and the department should give attention to identifying other opportunities where we can include the voices of children and young people in shaping service delivery at all levels of the organisation.

Relevant Background and information

8. For the purposes of this report, the participation activity overview is divided into three sections –
 - a) Care Ambassador activities
 - b) Participation Officer-led activities
 - c) Participation in the Districts.
9. Overview of participation in numbers –

• Ambassador activities	67
• County Activities (WGT and ICE ¹)	139
• District activities	482
10. The Participation Officer has supported with activities open to children across the County and has also co-ordinated opportunities for young people to engage with decision-makers on a national level.

¹ WGT - We've Got Talent - HCC's talent show for children in care.
ICE Project - This ambitious, innovative programme is a collaboration between Hampshire Cultural Trust and Hampshire Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, provided by Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust. We set out with the joint view that arts and cultural activities can have a positive impact on our psychological health and emotional wellbeing.

11. Accommodation inspections

The Care Ambassador group works with Commissioning to complete inspections of post-16 accommodation. Young people can give their own unique perspectives which are incorporated into the inspection report and fed back to the provider for action where required. Young people completed three accommodation inspections during 2020.

12. Meeting with the Children's Commissioner for England

In June 2020 two young people had the opportunity to meet with the Children's Commissioner for England. The purpose of this meeting was for the Commissioner to explore young people's experiences of being away from school during lockdown, and how young people felt about returning to school after lockdown. The young people's views were used to inform central government policy and planning.

13. Interviews for the new Virtual School Head

In June 2020, a young person was involved in the interview process for the new Virtual School head. Feedback from the panel showed that his contribution was valued and was useful in confirming their decisions.

14. Consultation on county policies and strategy

Care Experienced young people have been consulted on three areas of service improvement – personal allowance payments, health passports, and the review of the Independent Reviewing Service. In total eight young people were involved in these consultations.

15. In the period between January and December 2020 there were opportunities for care experienced children and young people to meet the Participation Officer and express an interest in participation activities. Young people have used these opportunities to raise queries and concerns, which have been passed on or actioned as appropriate. In total, 28 young people attended Care Ambassador meetings during 2020.

16. The Care Ambassadors' meetings have continued throughout 2020, moving to online platforms in response to Covid-19 regulations. This group has previously operated as a 'closed' group of young people who have made a longer term commitment to the role, but the impact of Covid-19 has led to some changes in this. Over the lockdown period, several Care Ambassadors have paused or ended their involvement, reporting that other pressures such as exams, accommodation, and employment issues have taken priority. In response, the Participation Officer has continued to hold Care Ambassador meetings, and, where possible, offered participation opportunities as one-off commitments. Moving forward, it could be that the Care Ambassador group includes a mix of young people who wish to make a longer-term commitment and develop in the role, and those who want to participate in shorter term projects. This may allow more young people to get involved in participation work and could allow a broader range of voices to be heard. The roles and

remit of the Care Ambassadors group will need to be reviewed as part of the 2022 – 2025 Participation Strategy.

b) Participation officer led activities

17. The Participation Officer has continued to work with district participation leads to support and promote engagement activity. This has mostly happened through regular meetings with the district leads, to provide support, and discuss ideas.

18. ICE project

The ICE project ran for 10 weeks between January and March 2020. This project is part of a wider county initiative by Hampshire CAMHS and Hampshire Cultural Trust. All ICE projects seek to enable young people to express feelings through the creative arts and improve their mental health and wellbeing. For 2020 we had the opportunity to work with Winnall rock school at their studios in Winchester. Six of our young people attended once a week over the 10-week period. In that time, they met with professional musicians and artists involved in the music industry. They wrote and produced a song which they presented at the celebration evening in December 2020 (which was attended by the Director of Childrens Services). As well as creating and producing a song, young people in care were able to meet others who have had similar experiences, which is something often requested by care experienced young people.

19. Legends of Lockdown podcast

The first lockdown offered the chance for us to explore online broadcasting methods and as a result the first podcast was produced. The idea for the podcast came from a meeting with the North West Care Ambassador group in March 2020. The podcast was split into three sections - interviews with the Corporate Parenting Board, Voices from lockdown – where 13 young people shared their thoughts and feelings on lockdown, and it finished up with a brief interview with a young person involved with the ICE project and clip of the song. This was largely an engagement activity, at a time when staff and children were exploring new ways of keeping in touch and maintaining effective relationships. The podcast was created between March and June 2020.

20. Voices Library

Building on the success of the podcast we decided to invest further in capturing this voice of the child. Between June and August 2020, 13 young people were recorded speaking about their reflections on what a good home, or carer looks and feels like. These audio recordings are used in GETS training, available for staff to hear, and for use in training events.

21. We've Got Talent

We've Got Talent took place between May and August 2020. The first round was district based – children and young people were invited to submit entries (by video, photograph, or other media) and districts chose local winners in each category to progress to the final. The winners of the final were selected by a panel comprising Corporate Parenting Board representatives, young people,

and a foster carer, with prizes available. This event was inspired by an art competition held locally within a district, which received good feedback from care experienced young people who took part.

22. Feedback from young people on We've Got Talent shows that they enjoyed the event because it was fun and gave them an opportunity showcase their talents. The competition concluded with a celebration event, which was attended by the Director of Children's Services. We've Got Talent will be run again in 2021.

23. Introduction to Care

Introduction to Care is an animation aimed at 7–12-year-olds, to help them understand what has happened to them when they first come into care. The idea came from conversation between the Corporate Parenting Board and care experienced young people, who explained how hard it was to understand the information that was given to them at the point they come into the care of Hampshire County Council. The video was produced in consultation with more than 50 care experienced young people, and co-ordinated by the Participation Officer. The video is now available on the County's corporate YouTube channel.

[Hampshire Children and Families - Introduction to Care - YouTube](#)

c) Participation in the Districts

24. Participation is considered well embedded in social work practice with families. As a department we are confident that we are seeking children's views, talking to families about what they want, and incorporating this into our assessments and plans. This will be further strengthened as the Family Plan and Family Meeting Model are further embedded into practice.
25. Wider participation in districts has focused primarily on engagement, particularly throughout the lockdown period. Districts have been creative, in maintaining good relationship with young people, and boosting morale during a time that has been unsettling for many young people. Activity logs show that most of these events generated feedback, that districts were able to take away and action as required. Districts report their activity through the district and county PAG.
26. Below is a summary of some of the engagement activities that have been run by districts –
- Big Art Awards – this was an art competition which was judged by other young people (East Hants). This event inspired We've Got Talent, which was run later in the year
 - Weekly challenges for Children in Care and Care Leavers, which were added to a running PowerPoint presentation (Eastleigh/Winchester CIC and CL teams)
 - Children in Care online choir (Eastleigh/Winchester)
 - Care Leavers' Lockdown club. This was held weekly and included fun activities such as quizzes, baking, quizzes, 'keepy uppy' videos, meaningful photographs, and other activities suggested by young

people. These happened weekly throughout lockdown and young people decided that it was no longer needed as lockdown eased (Hart & Rushmoor)

- Direct work event organised which sought feedback from children about their relationship with their social worker (Basingstoke, New Forest).
- Fun and Feedback sessions where staff organised activities for children (e.g. mini beauty treatments, making pizzas, 'themed' events including Halloween) and consulted them on practice issues (New Forest)

Conclusions

27. Participation work during 2020 has focussed mainly on engagement, which has been necessary due to the circumstances created by the global pandemic. This has been to make sure that staff remain visible to children and young people, and to maintain supportive relationships through fun activities. While opportunities for participation (i.e. influencing creation and delivery of services) have been available, it has been harder to engage young people in these. This has been due to a combination of factors including pressures on young people and families/foster carers, the challenges of maintaining virtual engagement over an extended period of time, and the pressures on staff that have led them to focus on other priorities during Covid. Nonetheless, there are many examples of highly creative means of engagement, that have evolved over time. Some activities may not continue beyond the lockdown periods, however, there have been valuable lessons learnt about engagement which can be taken forward to complement methods that have been used previously.

28. Moving forward, these are the priorities agreed for participation activity.

- i) the Participation Strategy is being refreshed, to provide a framework and direction for participation activity for the 2022-2025 period. Recent participation work has sought to ensure that children and young people are fully consulted and included in the plans for themselves and their families, and on ensuring that engagement activity is promoted within districts. This activity is now well embedded, meaning that we can develop our participation activity further by focusing on ensuring that children, young people and their families are given opportunities to contribute to service shaping and delivery. The strategy will consider the future of the Care Ambassadors' group, and will look to ensure that the membership, configuration and purpose support the aims of the refreshed strategy.
- ii) improve communication with children and young people, and access to participation activity. We are considering the communication methods available to us, including social media, and we will build on the lessons learnt during the pandemic about use of different platforms to engage a wider range of children and young people in participation activity.

REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Strategic Plan

Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:	no
People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:	yes
People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:	yes
People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:	yes
OR	
This proposal does not link to the Strategic Plan but, nevertheless, requires a decision because:	
<i>NB: Only complete this section if you have not completed any of the Strategic Plan tick boxes above. Whichever section is not applicable, please delete.</i>	

NB: If the 'Other significant links' section below is not applicable, please delete it.

Other Significant Links

Links to previous Member decisions:	
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>
Direct links to specific legislation or Government Directives	
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents	
<p>The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)</p>	
<u>Document</u>	<u>Location</u>
None	

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

1. Equality Duty

The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Act with regard to the protected characteristics as set out in section 4 of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation);
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (see above) and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

2. Equalities Impact Assessment:

See guidance at <https://hants.sharepoint.com/sites/ID/SitePages/Equality-Impact-Assessments.aspx?web=1>

Equalities Impact Assessment:

This is a report informing/updating the Panel on the work of the Hampshire Children and Families Principal Social Worker and as such has no impact on groups with protected characteristics.