

Children and Families Participation Strategy

2022-2025

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1. Introduction:

Hampshire Children and Families branch is aspirational for the outcomes of all our children and young people. The purpose of this strategy is to ensure that all children, young people and families receiving a service from children's social care in the Children and Families Branch, are listened to and involved in the decisions that affect their lives and more widely, have an active involvement in shaping the delivery of services we provide to children and young people within Hampshire Children's Services and beyond. Improving outcomes for children and young people as set out within the Hampshire Children and Young People's Plan is a central priority for our work.

This will be achieved through the promotion of meaningful participation of all children and young people and the Rights, Respect and Responsibilities (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child), to help children and young people to become responsible citizens, understand and promote their own rights and responsibilities and respect the rights of others.

Every child has the Right to be Heard (The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child, article 12 states). The voice of children and young people is a fundamental element which must remain at the heart of service delivery and development in order to provide a needs-led and aspirational service to our community.

We are continuing to strengthen our organisational culture, where participation and engagement of children and young people is embedded within practice and is the golden thread through all levels of service development and delivery. This requires continued departmental and corporate commitment. The department is responsible for equipping the workforce with the skills and knowledge needed to ensure that the views of children and young people are heard and make a difference through training, reflective supervision and outstanding leadership and management.



2. Vision

All children and young people have the opportunity to participate in decisions which affect the lives of children and families in Hampshire, and we will listen carefully and act on what they say will change and improve their lives.

3. Principles for Participation in Hampshire Children and Families

“The ‘right’ of all children to have their opinions taken into account when decisions are being made that affect them” – Unicef

The following principles form the foundation of the Participation Strategy:

- 1. Participation is driven by the needs of children, young people and families.**
- 2. All children and young people should have an equitable opportunity to participate, and we recognise our responsibility to provide additional support for those that need it.**
- 3. Children and young people’s participation is based on a properly resourced framework, that implements the ‘you said, we did’.**
- 4. Hampshire County Council recognises the importance of positive relationships as a stepping stone for effective participation which will bring mutual benefits for children, young people and service providers.**
- 5. Participation requires a whole service approach, which is consistent and responsive, and where the child and their needs are in the forefront of any service improvement.**
- 6. Hampshire County Council acts as the Corporate Parent for our children and young people in care and ensures that we provide the highest standard of care.**

4. Aims

The overarching aims of this strategy are to:

1. Establish a shared vision for participation for all children, young people and families in Hampshire.
2. Champion the principle that Participation is not simply about consultation with children and young people but ensuring their views influence decision-making and bring about change.
3. Ensure that the voice of children and young people, especially those with protected characteristics, is central to all participation work.
4. Ensure that participation is embedded throughout all design and delivery of services, highlighting the benefits it brings and the opportunities for continuous improvement.
5. Set out an action plan for the development of participation across the county, that incorporates the Hampshire Approach and our strength based way of working.
6. Agree and implement a monitoring process to ensure that an outstanding service is maintained, and agreed outcomes are met.

5. Benefits of participation:

1. Children and young people have a right to be heard and involved in decisions that affect them. (UNCRC, 1998)
2. There is a consistent strategic approach to anyone under the age of 18 years and in the case of care experienced young people, we extend the age range to 25 years.
3. Children and young people have the power to influence and achieve change in their own lives and for wider service delivery, which enhances their sense of self-esteem and wellbeing.
4. Participation gives individuals the opportunity to have their say on a whole range of issues, to shape decisions and create positive outcomes and changes.
5. Participation provides organisations with an opportunity to strengthen their governance arrangements through increased democratic decision making and shared accountability.

6. Strategic Framework

All staff in the Children and Families Branch are promoters and facilitators of participation. The below framework will support the governance of the strategy.

1. **The Children and Families Management Team provide the strategic governance for the participation strategy and action plan.**
2. **The children in care council and care ambassadors (among other groups) will contribute to assuring that our participation activities meet the stated principles and priorities.**
3. **Thematic or systemic priorities are identified by the strategic leads as part of ongoing service development and children, young people and their families are informed of changes or improvements.**
4. **Teams/services will be responsible for local engagement activity and will report back through county meetings.**
5. **Staff will be provided with opportunities to consult with experts on participation.**
6. **The Children and Families Toolkit will include resources on promoting participation of children in their own plans.**

All those who work directly, or indirectly, with children or young people within the Hampshire Children and Families branch should recognise the importance of their role in integrating participation into daily practice.



7. Inclusion

One important facet of Participation is the notion of inclusivity; offer *all children and young people* the equitable opportunities to participate. To achieve the above it is necessary to focus the required resource to include groups of children and young people that are harder to engage or require additional support to allow active engagement to happen.

When planning participation programmes/activities with children and young people, it is important to ensure that this is accessible to all relevant groups of children and families, and that particular consideration and support is given to the most vulnerable groups. The vulnerable groups are identified as, but not limited to:

- children we care for and care experienced young people
- children from minority ethnic backgrounds
- children and young people in relative deprivation
- children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities
- children and young people in service families
- lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people
- children and young people who are victims of domestic abuse
- teenage parents
- young carers
- Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children



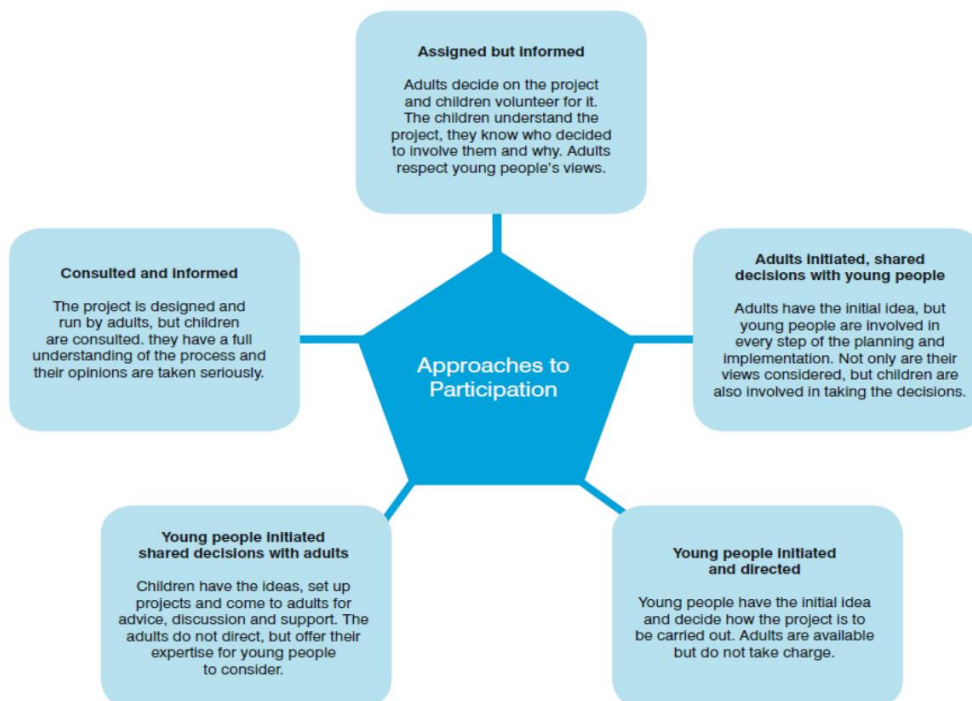
8. Methods of Participation:

Communication methods used will have an increasingly significant bearing on the successful inclusion of children and young people in participation. For children and young people, the preferred method of communication is consistently moving towards means such as social media, phone apps and websites, as opposed to letters or phone calls.

As important as the range of engagement activities/opportunities is, so too are the practicalities of letting children and young people know how, where and when they can participate. Similarly virtual participation is a way in which we can reach a larger cohort of children and young people who may not take the time to travel and participate in person but may be prepared to join in an online chat/ e-meeting or video conference. Activity days can also be used to offer practical, fun sessions with the purpose of group participation.

9. Model of Participation:

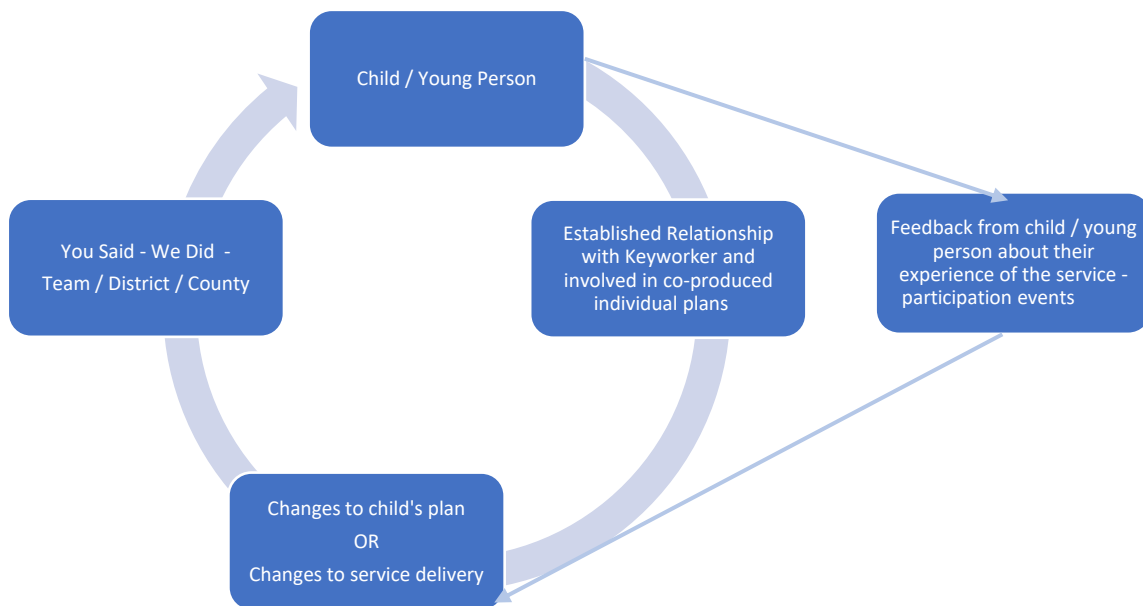
Hampshire Children and Families will use a Participation model that will incorporate one or more of the below approaches as needed, in response to children and young people's ideas and views or to the identified strategic priority.



10. Participation of all Children and Young People

Participation in their own plans - The strategy is set up using the principles of the social model¹, which recognises that societal barriers need to be actively removed in order to include all children and families. We ensure that everyone receiving a service from the department participates within their individual plans and contribute to its development and review. The purpose is to harvest the voice of children and young people through developing a trusting relationship with their workers enabling children and young people to express their views with confidence. As part of the strategy, we recognise the benefit of engagement in group activities for children and families, with people who may have had similar experiences.

Participation in planning and shaping service delivery and improvement – The strategy will cover planned participation activity that contributes to service improvement and children and families will be offered the opportunity to influence and shape the wider service delivery through defined and time limited programmes.



¹ The social model says that **people are disabled by barriers in society**, not by their impairment or difference. ... The social model helps us recognise barriers that make life harder for people. Removing these barriers creates equality and offers disadvantaged or disabled people more independence, choice and control.

12. Governance

The governance arrangements for participation in the county are multi-layered and reflect the business as usual model of shared responsibility and accountability. This is described in detail below.

As part of wider governance arrangements, the Corporate Parenting Board will hold the Hampshire Children and Families branch accountable against its strategic priorities, through robust scrutiny of the delivery of these priorities for children in our care and care experienced young people. They will do this in partnership with children and young people who receive a service from the department.

The Corporate Parenting Board will ensure that:

- The Hampshire Children and Families branch act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people who are or have been in our care.
- The Hampshire Children and Families branch encourage children in our care and care experienced young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
- The Hampshire Children and Families branch will take into account the views, wishes and feelings of the children and young people in our care and care experienced young people.
- The Hampshire Children and Families branch helps children and young people in our care and care experienced young people to gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.
- The Hampshire Children and Families branch promotes high aspirations, and seeks to secure the best outcomes, for children and young people in our care and for care experienced young people.
- The Hampshire Children and Families branch ensures that the children and young people in our care and care experienced young people are safe, and have stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.
- The Hampshire Children and Families branch prepares children and young people in our care for adulthood and independent living.

Roles & Responsibilities of Children and Families Branch Management Team (CFMT) and Director of Children's Services.

- To oversee development of integrated planning, commissioning and service delivery, which achieve agreed outcomes for children and young people in Hampshire.
- To agree principles, overall direction and resourcing of the Participation Action Plan 2022 and future years
- To monitor progress of the Participation Action Plan 2022 (and future years) and evaluate its impact annually via the Self-Assessment, QUIP and service plan review processes.
- To promote the Participation Strategy with the departmental management team, cross department and with elected members.
- To promote the Participation Strategy across partner organisations within Hampshire and regionally.

Roles & Responsibilities of the Strategic Lead for Participation

- Review and update the Participation Strategy as needed and at least every 3 years.
- To update the Participation Action Plan every 6 months in line with the reporting timetable to CFMT.
- To conduct an annual evaluation of outcomes in relation to the participation action plan.
- Collate and analyse the learning and feedback from county wide participation activity and use this to inform service development. The vehicle for service development will be the service plans and any bespoke projects commissioned by CFMT.

Roles & Responsibilities of the wider Children and Families Management Team – District, Service and other Senior Managers:

- To agree service priorities based on the Participation Strategy, and to agree participation related actions in service plans on an annual basis.
- To secure the resource needed to achieve the outcomes outlined by the Participation Strategy and agreed by CFMT.
- To manage the delivery of the Participation Strategy through the action plan.
- To manage the impact of the Participation Strategy.
- Contribute to the annual evaluation of outcomes in relation to participation.
- To ensure the Participation Strategy is implemented across the Children and Families Branch to enable children, young people to shape services.
- To promote the Participation Strategy across local partners and district-based organisations in Hampshire.

Roles & Responsibilities of Team Managers, Independent Reviewing Officers, Assistant Team Managers and Senior Social Workers:

- To inform the relevant District/Service/Senior Manager of the level of participation across their teams and the district including feeding into the quarterly updates to the Participation Action Plan/Service Plans.
- To outline need and resources required to implement the Participation Action Plan.
- To build a programme of participation and engagement activity locally in response to what children and families are telling us.
- To monitor the activity and quality of participation across various groups, activities and engagement events led by them.
- To support the Participation Leads in teams/districts/services and receive reports from them.
- To share good practice and implement a 'you said, we did' approach to participation.
- Contribute to the annual evaluation of outcomes in relation to participation.

Roles & Responsibilities of staff working directly with children and families including Participation Leads in districts/services.

- Participation Leads to meet on a regular basis as a whole group.
- To identify participation opportunities for children and young people.
- To share good practice and implement a 'you said, we did' approach to participation.
- Work together to respond to pieces of work and agree collective approaches to projects, consultations and participatory activities / events in Hampshire.
- Implement agreed pieces of work.
- Share strengths and support each other in areas where development is identified.
- Keep managers and the Participation Strategic Lead updated on progress.
- Publicise participation opportunities to other workers through the production of regular communication to inform others of work undertaken and ongoing locally and county wide.
- Publicise participation opportunities to children and young people in locally and county wide.
- Contribute to the annual evaluation of outcomes and impact in relation to Participation work
- Benefit from learning and development opportunities in relation to participation.

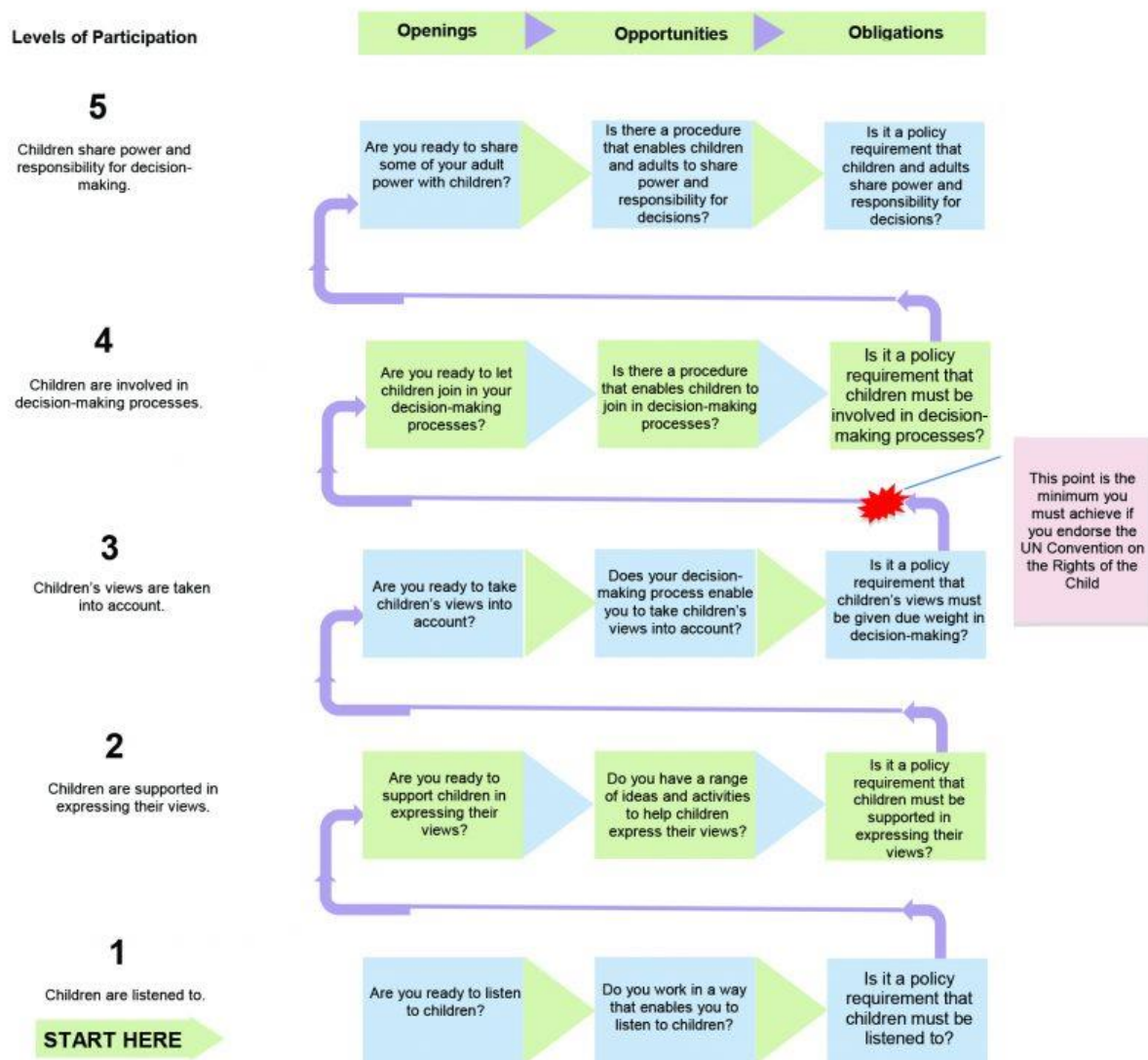
Responsibility for individual Children's plans

- SWs, TMs and IROs are responsible for creating, implementing and reviewing children's plans and listening to the voice of the child and ensuring this influences the plan. There are assurance mechanisms in place both internally (case file audits, reviews by IROs, peer inspections etc) and external to HCC (HSCP, Ofsted) that ensures this remains a priority.

13. Accountability, Evaluation and Continuous Improvement:

i. Following a consistent roadmap

The Children and Families Branch will use this roadmap in scoping, planning, delivering and reviewing the participation element of any strategic or service level activity, where appropriate. Levels 1 to 3 are well established in Hampshire and business as usual. Level 4 is continuously embedding with some areas stronger than others, for example children are involved in decision making within their My Life, My Future plans. Level 5 is aspirational, and we will try to maximise these opportunities for our children and families.



ii. Matrix of Participation - an evaluation tool

The below matrix is a particularly useful tool to encourage organisations to consider whether they are offering children, young people and families a spread of engagement opportunities, and our experience is that attempts to just provide opportunities at one side or other of the matrix is unlikely to lead to sustainable and effective youth participation which leads to positive change for young people.

In Hampshire, we have been strong for a while in involving individual children and young people in their planning and in encouraging children and young people to participate in surveys/one off events (Columns A and B). We have begun, through various initiatives (projects like Basingstoke Housing Project, Care Leavers' Week, involvement in interview panels etc.) to involve young people in time limited initiatives or peer reviews. It is known that participation methods towards the middle of the matrix are important. It is through involvement in events; in creative projects; and in short-term activities that many young people can develop the confidence to express their views and can build the networks with other young people and with supportive adults that enable and encourage them to then get involved in further participation where they could have power to make serious change happen. This type of activity will be our primary focus for the next 3 years.

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		Individual Complaints and Feedback	Surveys and one off events and consultations	Practice initiatives: time limited, focused activity	Peer activity: training, research, evaluation	Young representatives on advisory groups and shadow boards	Young people involved in governance with or without adults
	8						
	Young person initiated shared decisions with adults						
	7						
	Young person initiated and directed						
	6						
	Adult initiated and shared decision with young person						
	5						
	Consulted and informed						
	4						
	Assigned and informed						
	3						
	Tokenism						
	2						
	Decoration						
	1						
	Manipulation						

Useful links:

[Applying corporate parenting principles to looked-after children and care leavers
\(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/publications/applying-corporate-parenting-principles-to-looked-after-children-and-care-leavers)

Case Study - Sarah

Sarah is being cared for by her maternal grandparents who are her connected carers, she has been known to Children's Social Care since 2008 from the age of 3 years old. Sarah's experiences both in the care of her mother and in the care of the local authority have had a deep and profound impact on her.

Sarah finds it difficult to meet with people on her own, without the safety of her grandparents being close by. This is because Sarah is highly anxious about any unknown people or even people her own age contacting her, she will not have an email address and will block any new numbers on her phone if she does not recognise them or will refuse any contact that her grandparents have not prepared her for.

Gaining Sarah's views may seem challenging but nevertheless, it is a priority for us to do so. Sarah spoke to her Independent Reviewing Officer about how we can ensure that she has a voice.....

- Provide me with information which is as clear as possible taking into account my dyslexia.
- Give me plenty of notice of any potential contact/visits so that I can prepare myself for any meetings.
- Send me feedback on what was talked about and how my views are being progressed or listened to.
- I prefer small group sessions with people/young people I have spent some time with.
- Please make contact through people I trust initially, as, if they are happy then I will be too.
- I do not like too many changes and want to be told in advance of any changes being made, as it takes time for me to digest the information.
- In order to build a trusting relationship with professionals or those who seek my feedback, please make sure that what I say is checked with me and is accurate.





Case Study - The Big Activity Week

105 young people between ages 8 to 14 years participated and covered six residential centres in August 2021. The week was extended to accommodate a larger age range across six residential centres. The young people in the eldest age range even ventured into our Hampshire County Council run Mountain Centre in Wales and had a successful residential experience. The feedback from carers and young people has been overwhelmingly positive.

A selection of feedback is below:

'...my girl hasn't stopped talking about it and took part in something that I never thought she would! She also asked me if she could go next year.'

'...our lad had the week of his life. Made new friends and took part in new experiences.'

'...I've loved being part of the BAW again this year after we missed out last year due to covid. I'm already looking forward to next year and hope we get the opportunity to go to Wales like my older brother did as he had an amazing time.'

'...this is an opportunity like no other. Our children get to spend time with other children in a similar situation. it makes them feel like they are not alone. What an amazing project this is, it's impacted by 2 boys in so many ways, giving them memories that will last a lifetime.'

'...I've pencilled the date in for next year already and the children still talk about it all the time. I am so pleased this has been set up for our children. One of my boys has never had a successful residential experience with school because they cannot manage his behaviour. The staff are well trained and understand the needs of our children which is reassuring knowing they are in safe hands.'