



Leicestershire Children and Family Service Voice and Influence Strategy

| 2023-25

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Foreword

We are delighted that we are launching our refreshed Voice and Influence Strategy. We want to thank everyone who has contributed to making sure that voice remains central to our work with children, young people and their families, and importantly, that we use what they say in the design and development of individual plans and services.

We know that there is phenomenal direct work undertaken with the children and young people we support. Writing case records to the children has enabled front line staff to bring alive the lived experience of the child. Over the past 4 years we have looked to embed further the use of the Lundy framework and ensure that training is available to support the workforce in the use of this model. We are currently focused on the use of language and making sure that, in all our interactions with children, young people and families, we use plain language that includes them and not professional jargon that excludes them.

Our ambition is that Voice and Influence is always at the heart of our work with children, young people and their families and this strategy outlines clearly how we will achieve our ambition.



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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



“Hello, my name is Michal and I am a member of Youth Parliament and have been volunteering with CYCLe for the past 4 years and I personally love volunteering. I enjoy helping people and throughout my experience I have been able to improve my speaking abilities and make actual change that matters.”

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.

Children in Care Council and Supporting Young People After Caregroups 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 in training.

Through our County Youth Council and Youth Campaign 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 continue to be areas for further development and focus.

- **County Youth Council Leicestershire (CYCLe)** - a committed group of children and young people who meet bi-weekly to help shape, co-produce and influence decision making on CFS and wider matters that are important to them, plus additional groups for Young & Young Adult Carers and SEND children to enable issue based voice work to be undertaken in a safe space.
- **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. Members of youth parliament are elected for a term of 2 years.
- **Make your Mark** - young people in secondary schools across Leicestershire are supported and encouraged to take part in the National youth Ballot to identify the topics that they feel impact on their lives. The topics voted highest, nationally and regionally, are discussed at youth parliament and drive the campaign work of our youth parliament Members.
- **Youth Campaigns** - led by Members of Youth Parliament, young people are supported to undertake campaigns linking to key issues identified through the Make Your Mark youth ballot, the British Youth Council and CFS. The group feeds back to the Children and Families Partnership bi-annually.

“It makes me feel empowered and that I have a voice that is heard by everyone. I feel like everyone has their own opinion, but they don't get to express it that often, but this group has opened my eyes and my voice to express what I feel.”

“CYCLe has helped me develop my speaking skills, as well as confidence in public speaking. I joined it because I wanted to make a difference and being a part of CYCLe allows me to give my voice to key decision makers to hopefully improve the lives of young people. I definitely enjoy it, I've had plenty of interesting experiences and met a lot of amazing people who opened my mind to different perspectives.”

“I think CYCLe is important to me in that it's helped me make friends, suggest ideas that can help make people's lives better, which is one thing I really want, and to have a few laughs with my friends, letting me enjoy my time here.”

“CYCLE has allowed me to meet others who are very determined and want to make an impact on the world in some way. They are aspiring and everyone encourages everyone, it’s a welcoming environment which has boosted confidence and communication skills.”

“CYCLE helps me with my confidence building and it inspires me.”

CYCLE has helped me to meet like-minded people who want to make a difference in the world. They are ambitious and very supportive. It has shown to improve confidence, decision-making and conversational and social skills in, not just me, but most of the people I have spoken to.”

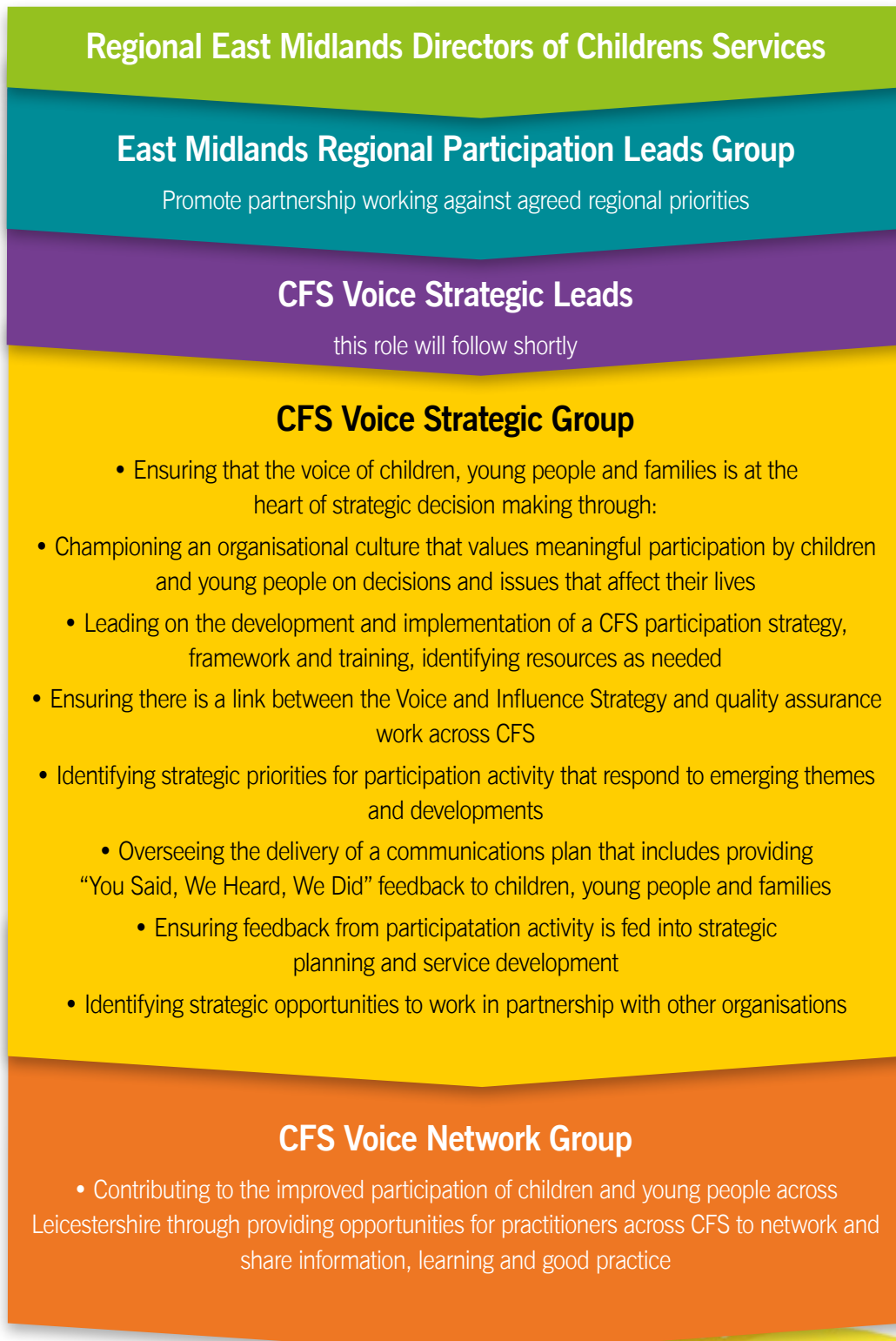
“I’m a member of the CYCLE group. I find it fun, its interesting and it gives me something to do other than laying in my bed all day.”

- **Children in Care Council (CiCC)** – an established group 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 to the Care Leaver team and directly to senior managers about the issues most important to them and to influence the service provided for our care leavers.
- **Parent Voice within Children and Family Wellbeing Centres** - including the use of mystery shoppers to quality assure the programme and bringing parent voice to interview panels
- **Care2Share targeted voice events** - for children to share their voices and experiences of CFS services to help influence future service design and delivery
- **Artsmark Award** - The Artsmark award has given children and young people the opportunity to engage in a wide range of arts activities. Their voice informs our planning and supports us to offer a range of arts opportunities to meet a variety of interests. We continue to develop our pupil voice page within the PEPs and encourage children and young people to share their voice in a variety of different ways. Some young people now chair their own PEP meetings.
- **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 (SEND Hub)** - enabling the lived experiences of parent/carers of children with SEN and Disabilities to influence service design and delivery, including the Local Offer and the Transforming SEND and Inclusion in Leicestershire (TSIL) programme.
- **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
- **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 and acting upon 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.

What we will do

1 Resources

For this strategy to be effective it is crucial that it be resourced across the whole of Children and Family Services, therefore we will continue to embed 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 continue to embed 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 What we achieved in 2020-23

Over the last three years considerable progress has been made around three key areas of practice and strategy. We are very proud of our progress and commitment to not only ensuring that the voices of our children are heard, but that action is taken when we listen. Within this strategy we have shared some fantastic ways in which we collaborate with children, young people, parents and carers from co-chairing the Corporate Parenting Board, to being partners in the recruitment of staff, to sharing their powerful stories about their lives.

We committed to implementing the East Midlands Regional Participation Best Practice Model and we have achieved this:

- We have implemented a structure that enable oversight and innovation around voice at all levels, from the strategic response to the work that we undertake with children, young people, parents and carers.
- We have held forums that enable voice Champions to share good practice voice work from across the department and to enable creativity.
- We have developed Service Delivery Plans to have a specific section related to Voice where each individual service makes one firm commitment during the year to focus and deliver outcomes.
- We have engaged in Regional Forums across the East Midlands to create collaborative funding opportunities for bespoke projects around Children in Care.

We committed to Introducing the Lundy participation practice framework and we have achieved this:

- We ran sessions in collaboration with Leicester City Council focused on an introduction to the Lundy model and how this can work in practice.
- We have launched the Lundy Model as our practice framework and have taken the opportunity to embed this within our strategies and work.
- We have trialled a tool to enable us to capture the depth and breadth of voice work across the Department.
- There has been attendance at training events and conferences where tools around capturing voice have been shared and this has been discussed by within the Voice Network group.

We said that we wanted to consider how we evaluate the impact of the work that we are undertaking around voice, participation and this is something that we want to take into the new plan so that we can look at best practice opportunities and research to consider how we will do this.

We are looking forward to the next part of this strategy in deepening our practice around voice.

Carly Turner

Voice Lead and Youth and Justice Service Manager

Appendix 1

CFS Strategy Action Plan 2024-25

Priorities	SMART Actions	When	Lead
1 Embed the East Midlands Regional Participation Best Practice Model	Engage with the Regional Participation Leads Group to share good practice examples and to collaborate on projects	Ongoing	Voice Lead and Sub-Group Attendees.
	Consider the best methods to capture examples of voice, participation and influence across the Department.	September 2024	Voice Strategic Group
	Review the impact progress achieved regarding voice within Service Delivery Plans	Annually	Lead Service Managers
	Review the voice communications plan	Sept 2024	Voice Network Group
	Engage with the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Participation Leads Group to develop a shared plan around voice, participation and influence across all agencies.	Ongoing	Voice Lead
2 Embed the Lundy Participation Framework	Collaborate with children, young people, parents and carers around the participation strategy.	March 2025	Voice Strategic Group
	Work with East Midlands Participation Leads to develop an online learning platform that can be shared on learning platforms across the partnership.	March 2025	Voice Strategic Group
	Deliver an annual Voice Week across the Departments	Annually	Voice Strategic Group
	Implement Lundy Model Workshop as part of the Induction Training for all new employees	September 2025	Voice Strategic Group
	Develop guidance around an agreed approach to the Lundy Model and how we ensure effective participation	March 2025	Voice Strategic Group
	Develop an understanding of how to best value the impact of the Lundy Model on the work across the Department	March 2025	Voice Strategic Group

