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Lambeth Children's Social Care Participation Strategy



About this document

Title	Children’s Social Care Participation Strategy
Purpose	The purpose of this strategy is to outline Lambeth children’s social care’s commitment, vision and direction of travel in ensuring the individual and collective participation of children and young people known to social care services.
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Introduction

The purpose of this strategy is to outline Lambeth children's social care's commitment, vision and direction of travel in ensuring the individual and collective participation of children and young people known to social care services.

Lambeth children's social care are committed to ensuring that every child and young person we work with have a voice and influence in decisions that affect them and that the performance of services will be improved by taking account of their voice. Lambeth children's social care services also ensure that children and young people thrive and are safeguarded and protected from harm. We will respect young people's need, aspirations, and right to express their own opinions.

We are committed to:

- Developing a culture of participation of children and young people, which is shared and understood by managers, practitioners, children and young people and their families.
- The participation of children and young people known to social care in individual decisions about their own lives and their collective involvement in matters that affect them.

We recognise the journey that has already been travelled in improving the participation of children and young people to improve outcomes. The development of this strategy and the associated action plan will support this good practice becoming embedded across the whole of Lambeth children's social care.

Drivers

The rights of children and young people to participate in decision-making are recognised in both international and national legislation including The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) 1989, and locally in policy and practice. Lambeth is fully aligned to the convention and is striving to be a Child Friendly Borough within the UNICEF programme.

The UN Convention also sets the framework for encouraging children and young people under the age of 18 to participate in decisions affecting their lives. Article 12 states that children and young people should have the opportunity to express their views on matters that concern them and to have those views taken into account when decisions are made. Other articles address the need for children and young people to have access to information and to be free to express their opinions.

The Munro review and Ofsted Safeguarding and Multi-agency inspection frameworks make explicit the responsibility of local authorities and their partners to empower, listen to and act on the voice of the child throughout their journey through services. This is particularly important for children and young people who are looked after, care leavers, those on the edge of care and those under a child protection order.

Our commitment, vision, and principles

Our vision

Lambeth children's social care will ensure all children and young people whom we are working with, and are capable of forming their own views will have the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting them. Their views will be given due weight according to the age and maturity of the child or young person. This will be embedded in all our relevant practices and policies, it is a process and not a one-off event which should be embedded into all our practices and policies. We understand that by ensuring meaningful participation, this enables the child/young person to have an influence on their own outcomes.

Our commitment

In Lambeth, children's social care staff are committed to engaging effectively with children and young people and supporting their meaningful participation. We will:

- Communicate with children and young people in the most effective way possible
- Listen and take seriously the views of children and young people
- Use plain language that is easily understood
- Keep in touch regularly
- Support children and young people in achieving their goals
- Put children at the centre of all our plans

We believe that participation is a right. It values children and young people as citizens in their own right. We believe that their voices should be heard and responded to by decision makers across Lambeth and influence policy making and the shaping of services.

We commit to this strategy and will support children and young people to become active citizens and value them as partners.

Our principles

Lambeth adopts the following guiding principles enshrined within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which also align to the Child Friendly Cities Initiative:

- Children and young people have the right to be listened to, to freely express their views on all matters that affect them and the right to freedom of expression, through association and access to information
- Measures will be put in place to encourage and facilitate their participation in accordance with their age, maturity and any special educational needs or disability
- Participation will promote the best interests of the child/ young person and enhance their personal development
- All children and young people have an equal right to participation without discrimination
- All children and young people have the right to be protected from manipulation, violence, abuse and exploitation

In addition to these principles, we will:

- Ensure equal opportunity for all children and young people known to social care to participate, including those who are deemed hardest to reach and most disadvantaged
- Support children and young people to engage and participate meaningfully with access to training, information and support to build their skills and confidence and participate in local, regional and national decision making

What we mean by effective participation

For the purposes of this strategy, participation is defined as:

Children and young people's involvement in individual decisions about their own lives, as well as collective involvement in matters that affect them

Participation is not a one-off, isolated activity, but a process by which children and young people are enabled to influence change for themselves and within an organisation. A culture of listening enables children and young people to influence decisions about the services they receive as individuals on a day-to-day basis, as well as how those services are developed and delivered for all children and young people who access them. As highlighted in the introduction to this strategy, Lambeth recognises two levels of participation for children and young people, those being individual and collective participation.

Individual Participation

Individual participation in children's social care primarily focusses on four areas of practice, those being:

- Assessments including Early Help Assessments
- Child protection meetings
- Child in Need meetings
- Family conferences
- Care planning and review meetings

There are a number of ways in which children and young people can be involved in the above, including:

- One to one consultation with their social workers, practitioners, personal advisor and independent reviewing officer (IRO)
- Submission of their views in writing or through video to assessment, planning and review meetings

- Chairing their own meetings
- Attending and being actively involved in meetings
- Using an advocate to bring their views to the attention of assessors and decision makers
- Engaging in a process of family led decision making
- Making a complaint through child friendly complaints procedure
- Opportunities to get their feedback following social work intervention
- Co-production of support services

The use of children's advocacy is seen as an effective way of ensuring meaningful participation of some children and young people known to social care. It enables children and young people to communicate their views and to influence decisions regarding their personal welfare, protection and care.

Collective Participation

Collective participation is a group of children and young people coming together to work in partnership with services and influence development and delivery through their own experiences. This may be virtually or by coming together as a group.

There are a number of ways in which children and young people can participate collectively including:

- Being part of Lambeth's children in care council Visions of Success, or within wider groups such as Lambeth's Youth Council
- Being involved in wider Ofsted inspections
- Being part of the aftercare forum
- Recruitment of staff within the local authority
- Participating in local, regional or national advisory forums and events
- Being involved in the development and delivery of training
- Being part of consultations or research, for example Lambeth's children looked after and care leavers survey
- Child or youth led action research
- Consultation events delivered through partner organisations such as Healthwatch Lambeth

What our children and young people have to say

There is more to us than what you read and what you see. We know you must be the professional but don't forget we have feelings too. You are not robots and neither are we. We are humans with feelings stuck in lots of processes

Help us feel comfortable, supported and listened to

Being in care is the most safe we have ever been, check that we are safe and adults in our lives are doing what they should be

Talk to me and ask me about what is going on

What our children and young people have to say

Call young people personally, build good relationships with us

The whole point about being in care is about being safe and well looked after by everyone working with us

Sometimes I do not want to hear what you have got to say, but I know you are looking out for me. I need you to encourage me and hear me

When I live in a foster placement, it is important that I have a say too!

Different levels of participation

Different levels of participation

Participation means different things to different people and there are different levels. The differing levels below all have their place in participation, but it is important to be clear at what level you are working with children and young people.



The benefits and challenges of participation

Involving children and young people in decision making processes can profoundly affect their lives, safety and well-being. Participation also ensures decisions are responsive to needs and are more likely to be respected and accepted.

Participation - benefits and challenges

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Benefits for children and young people

Children and young people:

- Have a voice and influence, which is their right
- Have opportunities for personal development, including the development of new skills and increased confidence and self-esteem
- Better services are created which are more responsive to the needs of children and young people
- Children and young people have increased ability to influence the way in which local democracy works, therefore promoting a sustainable and democratic society
- Children and young people develop an increased sense of ownership and belonging in the services and neighbourhoods they are involved in
- Children and young people are valued as equal citizens



Benefits for children's social care

Services are:

- More accountable and are able to improve their structures for decision making
- Able to better respond to the issues and concerns faced by children and young people
- Able to better design, deliver and evaluate based on actual rather than presumed needs, becoming child-centred
- Able to gain fresh perspectives and new ideas about services, policies and democratic processes



Challenges to consider

Challenges must be recognised to utilise the right tools to support real participation

- The involvement of children and young people who are subject to child protection
- Children and young people with a disability, specific engagement methods and tools will need to be developed to ensure meaningful participation
- Dealing with dilemmas when the child/young person's perspective contradict the professional opinion, particularly around child protection
- Where the young person is facing difficulties in assimilating information during times of trauma and disbelief

Examples of participation and engagement

Examples of participation and engagement

Involvement in meetings

- Young people should be met with prior to meetings to help them understand the purpose and prepare
- Young people may want to chair their own reviews
- Young people may want an advocate to support their participation

Child friendly information

- All information should be child friendly to support effective participation
- Some young people will want to be engaged in developing information

Understanding of planning, support and planning

- Young peoples voices at the heart of identification, assessment and planning
- Young people need to have a good understanding of plans and support enabling them proactively contribute and to have ownership of their goals



Use of social media

- Online platforms do engage in meetings and visits during covid
- Specifically designed applications to hear the voices of children and young people
- Online forums

Recruitment and training

- Young people should have involvement and weighted decision making in the recruitment of staff that will be working with them.
- Opportunities for young person led training

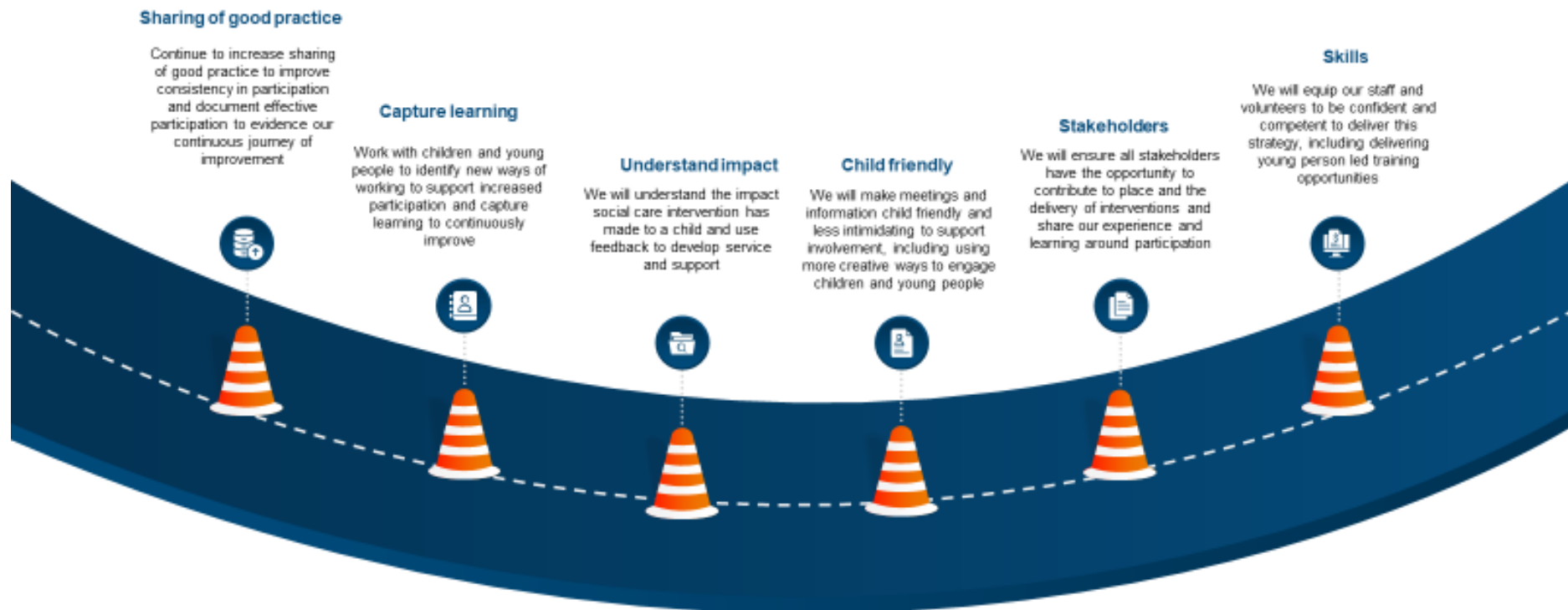
Wider engagement opportunities

- Young people should have the information to understand different participation groups they may want to join
- We need to provide individual support to build confidence in young people to join wider groups
- Annual consultations

Our direction of travel

Our direction of travel

In order for us to achieve our vision and deliver our commitments within this strategy, a number of objectives have been identified to improve participation



Further reading

References

1. UNICEF Child Friendly Programme <https://childfriendlycities.org/what-is-the-child-friendly-cities-initiative/>
2. Munro review of child protection: A child centred system <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/munro-review-of-child-protection-final-report-a-child-centred-system>

Helpful tools to aid participation

Top tips for Facilitators in online sessions - https://campaignbootcamp.org/blog/2020/going-virtual-top-tips-for-trainers-and-facilitators/?mc_cid=eccd6b7e7a&mc_eid=b78ff1c5b9

Different modes of online youth work, a look at some of the options you have available and different ways to reach young people - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RvCp8S-IQZo>

Framework for Human Connection (the importance of creating human connection in online spaces and some tips and activities included on how to do this) - <https://www.deepr.cc/framework>

Upskill yourself in Digital youthwork - https://digipathways.io/content/uploads/2019/11/Training_Toolkit_Skill_IT.pdf

Lots more ideas and info can be found on this padlet - https://padlet.com/dan_moxon1/codesign