

Children first and at the heart of all we do

DUDLEY'S PARTICIPATION STRATEGY



FOREWORD BY CATHERINE DRISCOLL

It is important that all children and young people are able to be active members of society and achieve their best outcomes. We work with children and young people providing a range of services and support and it is crucial that we create an environment where they have real influence over these services and the impact they have.

This strategy sets out our approach to participation in our child friendly borough and our ambition to ensure that children and young people join in decision making about services that impact upon them. Participation is not a one off event but is a process that allows shared decision making at practice, operational and strategic levels.

Thank you to the children, young people and families who worked with us to prepare this strategy – we will continue to strive to make this approach real throughout everything that we do

As young people, we believe that it important to listen to children and young people so that you know how to better practice and improve services.

Gathering young people's thoughts and views will make them feel valued and appreciated. The best way to do this is through listening and talking to children and young people.

Lydia and Lewis, Dudley Care Leavers



CONTENTS

Overview – Our Vision	
Our Statutory Duties.....	
Scope and Purpose of this Strategy	
What do we mean by Participation?	
Our Participation Principles & Key Priorities	
Our Participation Objectives	
How will we achieve our Participation Objectives?	
Participation Methods	
How will we measure the impact and success of our strategy?	
Review date	
Appendix One – Participation Workplan	
Appendix Two – Participation Working Group TOR	

OUR CHILD FRIENDLY VISION

Our vision is that all children and young people have equal opportunity to meaningfully participate in the decisions that affect them at the individual, operational and strategic levels.

We aim to embed participation across the local authority and within all services who work with Children and their families.

Our aim is to empower children and young people to use and develop their skills and knowledge to be decision-makers in their own lives.

We will focus on relational restorative practice “working with and not to”.

As a Local Authority we will model early intervention and restorative approaches based on equality, respect, high challenge and high support to ensure we are the ‘champions’ of our children, and their families.



2.2 OUR STATUTORY DUTIES

We recognise that all children and young people have a right to participate in decision-making; this is set out in Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, and is reinforced in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006.

At a national level, this right is enshrined in law via Section 19 of the Children and Families Act 2014, the SEND Code of Practice and the Care Act 2015. We know that good participation does not only mean listening to children and young people, but also acting on what they tell us, considering this in the decisions we make and providing feedback to them.

To make sure that all children and young people's voices are heard, we will ensure appropriate and accessible participation opportunities are available. This includes ensuring that children and young people have the skills and support they need to take part in a way that works for them. Good participation will be embedded as standard across our services and will continue throughout the child's journey.

2.3 SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF THIS STRATEGY

This strategy applies to all teams within Children's Services in Dudley and to all services we commission for children, young people and their families.

It also applies to Elected Members and those with responsibility for reviewing the quality of work with children, young people and families completed by Council employees and by commissioned partners.

It will be owned by the Principal Social Worker and Directorate Leadership Team (DLT) in Children's Services and will be monitored through quarterly reporting via the Participation Working Group and Quality Assurance reports.



2.4 WHAT DO WE MEAN BY PARTICIPATION?

Children and young people's needs are more likely to be met if:

- Children and their families have stable and meaningful relationships with the people supporting them.
- Children and young people are spoken to alone so they can freely express their views
- Practice is based on understanding each individual child's day-to-day lived experience.
- Children and young people are listened to.
- Practice focuses on the young person's needs and experiences and is influenced by their wishes and feelings.
- Children, young people and families have timely access to, and use the services of, an advocate.
- Our feedback from children and their families about the effectiveness of the help, care or support they receive informs practice and service development.

Participation means working together through formal and informal networks to listen, learn, understand and provide a service which helps young people and their families to have the right support at the right time to improve outcomes.



Hart's (1992) Ladder of Participation identifies eight levels of participation. The eight rungs of the ladder represent a continuum of power that ascends from nonparticipation to degrees of participation. It is designed to encourage those working with children to think more closely about the nature and purpose of children's participation. Hart's higher levels of participation are outlined below.

Consulted and informed: Adult-led activities, the child/young person is consulted and informed about how their input will be used and the outcomes of adult decisions.

Adult initiated shared decisions with youth: Adult-led activities, decision making is shared with the child/young person.

Youth initiated and directed: Child/youth-led activities with little input from the adult. Youth initiated shared decisions with adults:

Child/youth-led activities in which decision making is shared between the child/young person and adult, both working as equal partners. This is more commonly known today as "co-production".



OUR PARTICIPATION PRINCIPLES AND KEY PRIORITIES

Our key principles within our vision are:

- Listening and responding to the voices of our children
- Restorative practice... 'doing with, not for or to' and involving children in all processes so plans and assessments are co-produced
- Relentless focus on making a difference to children's outcomes

Our key priorities within our vision are:

- Create a shared vision for working "with" children, young people and families in participative ways
- Ensure participation forms a part of our day-to-day work that is guided by Dudley's Practice Framework and influences the organisation from the bottom up as well as from the top down
- Celebrating good practice for participation work and the types of voice and influence children, young people and families can and should have across Children's Services
- Ensure children, young people and their families are active participants in the decision-making processes about their lives and service development
- Ensure a systematic approach to participation which informs practice, training, development, design, delivery and commissioning of services
- To promote creative and adaptable approaches to participation
- To monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and outcomes of participation
- Reduce in-efficiency, duplication and consultation fatigue for young people and their parent/ carers and staff involved in engagement activity
- To create person centred communication tools and techniques to enable children and young people who cannot verbalise, their opportunity to participate and promote their voice
- Ensure the existing Participation Leads support wider services to remove barriers between organisations and parent carers, children and young people that may be preventing participation
- Encouraging a wider representation of views and experiences to feed into the Parent/Carer and Children & Young People's Forums
- To have fun

OUR PARTICIPATION OBJECTIVES

Our Participation objectives are underpinned by 5 Golden Threads with Children at the heart of all we do:

1. Voice & Influence of Children and Families - We will listen to our children and families lived experiences and offer the right support at the right time. We will work creatively to support children and young people to develop our services and their individual plans.

2. Outcomes Focused - We will ask key questions from our children, young people and families in a range of ways to understand how we are doing and what we need to do differently. We will measure the impact of participation through this feedback and our data performance.

Practice outcomes - How have services worked with me?

- I feel recognised as an individual
- I am listened to and respected
- I have a say in decisions affecting me
- I am able to work with and trust professionals
- I understand the concerns being discussed
- I am informed
- I feel supported
- My friends and my family are involved (if I choose)
- I feel safe to be involved
- I know my rights in this situation

Change Outcomes - What difference has the help made for me?

- I have improved clarity regarding my situation
- My skills have improved
- My self confidence, self respect and or self esteem has improved
- My personal relationships have improved
- I am better able to work with professionals
- I feel I am a better person
- I feel things are moving forward
- I set goals and can reflect on them

Quality of Life Outcomes - How do I feel as a result of the help provided?

- I feel safe and secure
- I am settled where I live
- I have positive relationships with important people in my life
- I feel I have more control over my life
- I am able to make decisions that influence my life
- I see people and feel included
- I communicate well with people around me
- I no longer have social work involved in my life
- I am able to ask for help when I need it.

3. Working 'With' Children and Families - We will support and empower young people to make sure that their views, hopes and aspirations are heard so that they can directly influence decision making and the services provided for them and co-produce their own plans. Doing this enables them to make a positive contribution to their communities develop personal and social skills as valued citizens of Dudley.

Dudley Children's Services believe that families and their networks are the most important influence on improving outcomes for children. We believe that if we work with families in relational ways, offering high challenge and high support, whilst keeping children at the heart of decisions that affect them, we can enable families to solve their own problems earlier and become more resilient. By providing the right amount of support for the right amount of time, we ensure that the Local Authority's intervention in family life only occurs when necessary but is timely, appropriate and proportionate.

4. Consistent and Straightforward - Dudley Children's Services believe that good communication with children, families, communities, practitioners, and partners is critical to achieving the best outcomes for children. Our communication will be consistent and straightforward through verbal (spoken or written) and nonverbal (using gestures, signs, or actions to convey a message) means. Our approach will be consistent and straightforward and our feedback from children and families will help us to embed co-production in all aspects of our practice. We will provide leaflets, video's podcasts to families about the roles within our services and the services we provide.

5. Building Resilience & Partnership - We will work in Partnership with individuals, communities, and organisations, to bring together their skills, knowledge and experiences of working together to improve the quality of life for our children and their families. Restorative Practice will be embedded in our partnerships to work collaboratively in designing and developing new policies, processes, and services through a range of partnership activities.

How will we achieve our Participation Objectives?

Our Restorative Strengths Based Practice Framework embeds collaborative working through relationship-based practice and is fundamental to our participation strategy. www.dudleycpp.org.uk/restorativepractice Continuous reviews of our directirate plan, individual service plans, feedback from Children, Young People and Families and our data performance reports will help us to measure and understand the impact of our participation strategy and the difference we are making.



How will we measure the impact and success of our strategy?

We will consult with Children and Young People and their families in a range of ways through existing groups including Children in Care Council, Care Leavers Forum, Future Voices Group, Parent Carer Forum, Dudley Youth Council. We will also offer opportunities for consultation via local and regional Surveys and participation events.



Individual participation, where children, young people and families are involved in the planning and design of his or her own plan. Ensuring the individual has a say in decisions about his or her life and service provision is the bedrock of good participation practice. We will provide choices about the ways in which children, young people and their families provide feedback including information via websites, phone calls after case closure, posted feedback leaflets.

Consultation in surveys and activities linked to quality assurance and improvement of services (such as audits, inspection, and involvement in recruitment), and representation on boards and committees. The focus is feedback about and developing existing services. This work has the potential to make strategic as well as operational impact, with children, young people and families providing feedback and helping shape decision making at senior level.

Co-production, where service providers work in true partnership with other services, children, young people, families and carers to co-design and deliver services that are effective and make a positive difference to people's lives. It's about individuals, communities and organisations, pooling their skills, knowledge and experiences and working together to improve the quality of life for people and communities. The focus is engaging children, young people and families in designing and developing new policies, processes and services.

The strategy is a working document which has been co-produced with input from our Children, Families and Parents and key stakeholders. The strategy will be reviewed annually, next due for review in June 2023.