



Children and Families Services Voice and Influence Strategy

2021-2023

Thriving children, fulfilling their dreams.



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Introduction and Purpose

In Redcar and Cleveland, we are committed to providing excellent services which improve the lives of children, young people and their families. We recognise the importance of involving the views of children, young people and families in decisions that affect them and services that they will receive from us. We believe that children, young people and families have a right to express their views about decisions that affect them and be involved in support plans to ensure they are tailored to their individual needs. Their feedback will help us understand how well we are doing and what we need to improve.

For a number of years we have demonstrated our commitment to hearing the voices of children and young people, with many examples of excellent practice. This strategy aims to embed this good practice to ensure that children and young people's individual and collective voices make an impact on the design and delivery of the services they access and influence the improvements required.

This strategy outlines our approach to ensuring consistent, inclusive and meaningful facilitation of the voices of children and families in Redcar and Cleveland, across our three service areas of Safeguarding & Children in Our Care, Early Help & Partnerships and Education & Skills.

This strategy sets out:

- The guiding principles
- The legal and statutory framework
- The benefits of voice and influence
- Our voice and influence values and pledges
- The plan of action

This strategy contributes to the Children and Families Directorate vision:



Thriving children, fulfilling their dreams.



Guiding Principles

This strategy is predicated upon the following beliefs:

- All children, young people and families have the right to be heard and have their views valued and acted upon.
- All staff undertake to involve children and young people at all levels in shaping their services and acknowledge that this enhances the quality of services provided and creates services that people want and need.
- Appropriate feedback is given to children, young people and their families, in a timely fashion, about the impact their feedback has had upon the service delivered.
- Children, young people and families should be involved in decisions that affect their lives and should be influential in the design of services.
- Voice and Influence activities are not considered to be a one-off and different types of activities need to be offered to enable children and young people to gain the confidence needed to engage in more complicated processes.
- Opportunities for children and young people to have their voices heard will be appropriate to their age and abilities.



The Legal and Statutory Framework

The principle of the wishes and views of children and young people contributing to both individual care decisions and service improvement is enshrined in the Children Act (2004), Children and Social Work Act (2017), Health and Social Care Act (2012), Children and Families Act (2014), HMIC Inspection Guidance (2015), Safeguarding Services (HM Government, 2015), Young People's Public Health Framework (2015), Ofsted Single Inspection Framework (2015), as well as Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).

The Benefits of Voice and Influence

We believe that hearing, and acting on the voices of children and young people has the following benefits:

For children and young people:

- Increased belief in their ability to create change and feel they have control over aspects of their lives
- Increased social inclusion and opportunities for active citizenship
- Increased levels of responsibility and decision-making, preparing them for adulthood
- Increased confidence and self-belief
- Opportunity to develop skills that will help them with education and employment

For our wider community:

- Improved relationships and a more positive perception of children and young people by their communities
- Increased community cohesion, in that children, young people and their families feel they have a place in their communities and are more likely to remain in them
- Increased involvement in community action and activity (including voting) from those who choose to participate
- Better understanding of changing attitudes and needs
- Opportunities for positive, proactive multi-generational contact

Practice Requirements

Promoting the voice and influence of children, young people and their families is the responsibility of all staff within our Children and Families Directorate. All service areas have a responsibility to encourage and facilitate the voices of the children, young people and families they work with and to implement changes where able.

Voice and influence activities will follow these four stages to ensure they are meaningful:

Planning

Voice and influence activity is driven at senior level and is a visible directorate priority;

Opportunities for children and young people's voices to be heard will be planned so that children and young people are involved in decision making (e.g. their plan or EHCP), in influencing services they receive (e.g. being asked to be involved in interviewing or evaluating services) and in the directorates governance (e.g. involved in commissioning services or commenting on new policies and strategies);

Plans are put in place to ensure that the voices of children, young people and families who are disadvantaged, vulnerable or hard to reach, are heard;

Voice and influence activities will be communicated and shared at a strategic level to reduce future duplication of activity and avoid children, young people and families being asked the same questions where possible.



Practice



Children and young people are informed of their right to take part in decision making and understand what is expected of them;

Children and young people are effectively prepared and supported especially in specific or technical activities such as recruitment and interviews;

Children and young people are made aware of the limits of their influence (managing expectations) and any confidentiality issues, such as where there is a safeguarding concern;

Children and young people are thanked for their contribution and rewarded if appropriate;

Children and young people are made aware of the impact of their involvement;

Voice and influence activities are carried out by staff who are properly trained and resourced to carry out this work, whilst acknowledging that this work is the responsibility of all staff and not the remit of a few specialists.

Monitoring and Reporting



Themes and messages from voice and influence activity at all levels are gathered, processed into a useful and easily accessible format and made available within the organisation as a whole and across the partnership;

Impact and quality measurements are set for this work, tailored to fit each members' purposes;

An annual review of voice and influence activity and impact is undertaken by the Consultation Leads Group, with a report produced for the Children & Young People's Partnership Board.

Regular reports are made available to teams and managers about the progress of the work against standards and quality measures.

Communication



Best practice, information gained and the impact of voice and influence activities is shared within and between partners, observing GDPR guidance;

The successes of this work are publicised and celebrated, with both staff and young people;

The value and impact are publicised in newsletters and on our website.

Plan of Action

This strategy will be overseen by the Consultation Leads Group, which is chaired by the Strategic Participation Officer and includes representation from all services within Children and Families, along with some of our partners. This group meets every 6 weeks and will take responsibility for reviewing progress of the action plan that supports delivery of our voice and influence activity. A report of performance will be provided quarterly to the Children and Families Directorate Management Team.

To meet the above requirements, each member of the Consultation Leads Group will agree to:

- Monitor the strategic direction of voice and influence activities;
- Receive and review reports from individual and collective voice and influence projects;
- Make recommendations for the improvement of voice and influence practice and activities;
- Review this strategy annually.

Our Voice and Influence Values



All work to seek the views of children and their families will be done in accordance with the following values:

Working in partnership - children, young people and families will be provided with opportunities to be involved in a range of decision making, in which their views hold equal weight to professionals. This includes co-production, co-design and joint decision-making;

Inclusion - we will involve and seek feedback from children, young people and families to ensure the decisions we make are based on feedback that is representative of the views within our communities. When planning voice and influence activities services will consider whether all stakeholders or a sample of stakeholders will be included, if only a smaller sample are involved they will consider if the views gathered are representative or if further work needs to be undertaken to enable other children, young people and families to have a voice;

Honesty and transparency - we will manage expectations prior to carrying out voice and influence activities by providing children, young people and families with the information they need to have an informed view. If there are pre-existing limitations these should be communicated at this stage. The process will have integrity and be tailored to circumstances. In the event that we cannot make changes in line with child, young person or family feedback (e.g. where something is a statutory requirement or where we do not have the resources to implement an idea) we will provide feedback explaining the reasons for this;

Maintaining positive relationships - we will communicate to participants how their input is of importance to us and we will maintain a two-way dialogue. We will treat participants with respect and keep them informed and always feedback the outcome of their views when they have been involved in voice and influence activities;

Learning and improving - we will respond to outcomes voice and influence activities and it will be an integral part of all of our service planning.

Our Voice and Influence Pledges to Children, Young People and Families



Pledge 1: The views of children, young people and families will be integral to the support they receive from us

This includes:

- Assessments and plans which feature the voice of the child, young person or family, including, EHCPs, Social Care and Early Help Assessments, PEPs and assessments completed by career advisors;
- Children in our care having the option to give feedback independently prior to their review.

Pledge 2: We will seek feedback from children, young people and families about the services they receive from us

Children, young people and families voice and influence will form part of our services quality assurance processes and cycle of continuous improvement. Direct feedback from children, young people and families will help us to establish the quality of the service being delivered and where improvements need to be made.

This includes:

- Seeking feedback on closed cases in Social Care and Early Help;
- Carrying out regular surveys (e.g. annual surveys);
- Facilitating groups where children and young people are supported to provide their views;
- Asking after a complaint has closed what the experience was like for the complainant.

Where feedback from children, young people and families indicates the need for additional training for staff working in our services this will be reviewed by Service Managers to identify the scope of the issue and provide development to individuals or wider sections of the service as needed.

Pledge 3: We will involve children, young people and families in making decisions about our services

This includes:

- Including young people on the panel when interviewing for relevant senior positions;
- Consulting the views of service users before we commission a new service;
- Including children, young people and families in the development or renewal of policies, strategies and plans.

Pledge 4: We will learn from the views of children, young people and families and feedback results

This includes:

- Inviting partners and stakeholders to be part of activities so we can share good practice;
- Feeding outcomes of voice and influence activities to those involved (You Said, We Did);
- Evidencing what we have done in response to feedback to improve practice.

