

Appendix One

AGENDA ITEM 5 a

REPORT TO CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

14 April 2023

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Participation Strategy – Children in our care.

SUMMARY

The Children in our Care Strategy (2021-2023) for Stockton-on-Tees identified a need to clarify the purpose, role, need for and importance of the voice of the child to ensure that this is embedded in all we do and hope to achieve. During October 2022 to February 2023 a strategy document was co-produced with Children in Our Care to support participation and decision making.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Corporate Parenting Board is requested to endorse the Participation Strategy (at Appendix One) including the co-produced principles for decision making and pledge to children and young people in our care.

DETAIL

Background

1. During October – February, work has taken place to co-produce with children in our care a strategy document to outline how we will work with children and young people to support their participation and decision making. This included:
 - Three workshops with the participants of the Let's Take Action Children in Care Council during October – November 2022 to co-produce the principles of how the council will support the participation and decision making of children and young people in our care.
 - A survey was distributed to all children and young people in our care about how we can involve them in decisions that affect them and other children and young people (33 responses).
 - A primary consultation event for children in our care (in partnership with the Virtual School) in January 2023 (all primary schools invited - attended by 11 children from four primary schools).

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- A secondary school consultation event for children in our care (in partnership with the Virtual School) at the ARC in Stockton on Tees in January 2024 (all secondary schools invited - attended by 6 young people from two secondary schools).

Progress to date

2. After speaking and listening to our children and young people to understand the best way to involve them in decisions that affect them, we have co-produced:
 - a) **Key principles that children and young people tell us are important for the adults in their lives to follow, that will support good decision making.**
 - **Keep relationships at the heart of everything we do together.** Treat us with respect, and as equals. Be honest about what is in our power to change, and what is not.
 - **Empower us to be the ones to decide what is important.** Give us the opportunity to be heard, and to be able to talk about what matters to us, not just what is on the adult's agenda
 - **Keep us up to date about what has changed.** Make sure when you communicate with us it is regular and consistent. When we take part in making decisions, we need to be kept informed about what has happened.
 - **Give us a friendly and safe environment.** The settings and environments where we carry out activities or take part in making decisions should be high quality and feel welcoming and safe.
 - **Give us choices about how we are involved.** Do things in a range of ways so that all children and young people can take part in decision making; some children and young people might not want to come to face to face activities.
 - **Make sure the language you use is easy to understand.** When you are talking to us or giving us information, it needs to be clear and easy to understand
 - **Do things at the right time and giving us enough time.** Wherever possible, involve us from the start and spend time with us so that we really understand what is happening.
 - **Make sure we will get something back from putting something in.** When we work together, give us opportunities to learn new skills, have fun, and acknowledge the difference our voice has made.
 - b) **A pledge to all the children and young people in our care which outlines what they can expect from the adults in their lives to support their involvement in decision making.**
 - Our relationships will be the foundation of everything we do together. We will treat you with compassion and care about you.
 - We will be open and honest about the decisions you are involved in, and help you understand when things cannot be changed, and why.

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- We will empower you to tell us, the adults in your lives, what is important and work with you to change things. This might be for your individual situation, or something that affects all children and young people.
 - We will give you opportunities to be involved in telling us what you think about how to make being in care better for children and young people and will do this in lots of different ways.
 - We will recognise and celebrate the difference that you are making when you are involved in decisions about you, and that affect other children and young people.
3. Following endorsement of the draft Participation Strategy, the next steps include :
- Sharing the principles of decision making and pledge with the Children's Services workforce.
 - Sharing the principles of decision making and pledge with all children and young people in our care along with information about how they can have their voice heard if the council are not honouring their pledge to young people.
 - Developing an implementation plan to ensure the strategic approach is embedded. Progress against these actions will be monitored through the Getting to Good and Beyond Board and reported periodically to Corporate Parenting Board.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4. There are no direct financial implications from the Strategy.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5. There are no specific legal implications from the Strategy.

RISK ASSESSMENT

6. There are no additional risks to those included on the existing risk register.

COMMUNITY IMPACT IMPLICATIONS

7. There are no specific legal implications from the Strategy.

COUNCIL PLAN POLICY PRINCIPLES AND PRIORITIES

8. The remit of the Corporate Parenting Board contributes to the key priority of: Making the borough a place where people are healthy, safe and protected from harm

CONSULTATION, INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS

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9. As outlined within the report, the Strategy has been coproduced with Children in Our Care.

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Appendix One



Participation and Co-production – Our Strategic Approach.

How we involve children and young people in our care in decision making.

Overview

All our children and young people across the borough have the right to be listened to, and to have their voices heard. This right is protected under article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which states that **children have the right to give their opinions freely on issues that affect them. Adults should listen and take children seriously.**

One of our key responsibilities as corporate parents is to consider the views, wishes and feelings of children and young people (Children and Social Work Act 2017). As corporate parents, we are committed to championing the children and young people who are in our care, putting their views and voice at the heart of everything we do to support them to thrive.

This document has been co-produced with the Lets Take Action Group (our Council for Children in our Care) and all of our children and young people in our care through:

- Development sessions with our Let's Take Action Group
- Surveys to all of our children and young people in care
- Primary and Secondary Consultation Hub events, supported by our Virtual School.

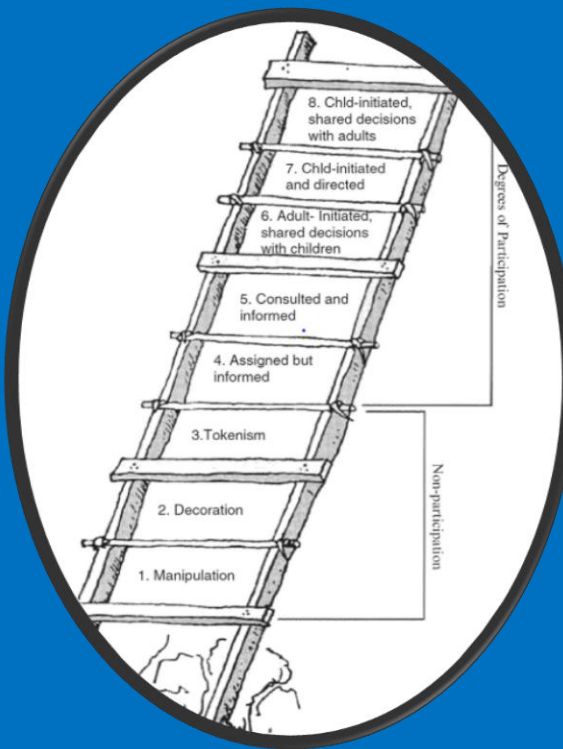
Through discussion, surveys, and activities, we have spoken to and listened to our children and young people to understand the best way to involve them in decisions that affect them, including:

Individual decision making: How they are involved in, and shape decisions related to the care and support they receive

Group decision making: How they are involved in, and shape decisions related to the design and delivery of services that affect all children and young people.

Strategic decision making: How they influence, and shape decisions at a strategic level (including the priorities that we identify as a council for children and young people).

Participation and co-production



Harts ladder of participation is a well-known representation of how much power children and young people have in decision making.

As corporate parents, there will be times when we need to communicate (inform) or seek the views of children and young people at specific times (consult).

Whenever possible, we are committed to working together from the start and for children and young people to be active partners in decision making (participation and co-production).

'You're asked your views and wishes and they get noted down. But ultimately the people with the power make the decisions'

(what will young people say if we get this right...) 'Well done adults!'

(what will young people feel if we get this right...) 'Im proud of myself for giving my views'

There are many different definitions of participation and co-production. Put simply, it is about involving children and young people in decisions which affect them and working in partnership to improve things.

Our children and young people have told us that 'decision making' is a term that can be easily understood by children and young people. Therefore, this document uses the term '**decision making**' to describe how we will inform, consult and co-produce with children and young people.

What does good look like?

'My voice is heard'

'Your views are listened to, and it changes your experiences'

'We have an opportunity to speak in many ways and have turns to help'

'(they) keep in touch with me all the time...that works better for me'

Our children and young people in our care have told us that good decision making for them means:

- Being involved in and **influencing** decisions which affect their lives
- Having their voices **heard** and **valued**
- Developing **new skills**, and **benefitting** from taking part
- **Setting the agenda and priorities**, as well as working on the priorities identified by the adults in their lives

Benefits for children and young people

Being able to challenge when things are not right and change them

Experiencing better services and support

Developing new skills and having new experiences (e.g., presentation skills, sitting on interview panels)

Feeling Valued

Being treated as an individual

Being part of decisions that affect their lives

Benefits for the organisation





Our children and young people experience better services and support





We understand and support our children, young people and family's needs and aspirations

We make the best use of the resources that we have

Involving our children and young people in decision making

The children and young people in our care have told us there are some important principles that the adults in their lives should follow to involve them in decision making:

Our principles	What this means for children and young people
 <p>Keep relationships at the heart of everything we do together. Treat us with respect, and as equals. Be honest about what is in our power to change, and what is not.</p>	<p>'Care about me, be consistent'</p> <p>'If we get this right, the rest will follow'</p>
 <p>Empower us to be the ones to decide what is important. Give us the opportunity to be heard, and to be able to talk about what matters to us, not just what is on the adult's agenda</p>	<p><i>'We should be heard, not just listened to'</i></p> <p><i>'Only we know what is important to us'</i></p>
 <p>Keep us up to date about what has changed. Make sure when you communicate with us it is regular and consistent. When we take part in making decisions, we need to be kept informed about what has happened.</p>	<p><i>'It's frustrating when we do the work then don't hear what has happened'.</i></p> <p><i>'Communication is key, and it goes both ways'</i></p>
 <p>Give us a friendly and safe environment. The settings and environments where we carry out activities or take part in making decisions should be high quality and feel welcoming and safe.</p>	<p><i>Somewhere we can be social, do activities then focus on change.</i></p>

 <p>Give us choices about how we are involved. Do things in a range of ways so that all children and young people can take part in decision making; some children and young people might not want to come to face to face activities.</p>	<p><i>'Choice is really important, so we don't exclude people</i></p>
 <p>Make sure the language you use is easy to understand. When you are talking to us or giving us information, it needs to be clear and easy to understand</p>	<p><i>'It is so difficult when jargon is used, and things are not explained'</i></p> <p><i>'Have respect and don't dumb it down if we are old enough to understand'</i></p>
 <p>Do things at the right time and giving us enough time. Wherever possible, involve us from the start and spend time with us so that we really understand what is happening.</p>	<p><i>'When its rushed, you can't build trust'</i></p>
 <p>Make sure we will get something back from putting something in. When we work together, give us opportunities to learn new skills, have fun, and acknowledge the difference our voice has made.</p>	<p><i>'Acknowledge I have done well...validation (is important) that I have done well and made a difference'</i></p>

Our pledge to children and young people in our care.

From listening to what is important to our children and young people about decision making, our promise to the children and young people in our care in Stockton on Tees is:

Our relationships will be the foundation of everything we do together. We will treat you with compassion and care about you.

We will be open and honest about the decisions you are involved in, and help you understand when things can not be changed, and why.

We will empower you to tell us, the adults in your lives, what is important and work with you to change things. This might be for your individual situation, or something that affects all children and young people.

We will give you opportunities to be involved in telling us what you think about how to make being in care better for children and young people and will do this in lots of different ways.

We will recognise and celebrate the difference that you are making when you are involved in decisions about you, and that affect other children and young people.

How we will know if we are getting this right.

We will regularly review our principles and pledge with our children and young people, through our voice forums, including Let's Take Action and Bright Minds Big Futures and the Children's Services Quality and Practice Group.

This document will be shared with all of our children and young people in care and their social workers, and if children and young people feel that we are not keeping our promises – their views can be discussed with their social worker and will be shared through to the Children's Services Quality and Practice Group.

A message to our children and young people - opportunities to be involved in decision making.

If after reading this document you want to find out more about taking part in decision making, our Lets Take Action Group and Bright Minds Big Futures are a great place to start.

Bright Minds Big Futures

Bright Minds Big Futures (BMBF) is a national award-winning youth-led movement, working together with Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council to make the Borough a great place to grow up

The group is managed by an elected panel of young people known as the Big Committee and is a great way for young people to:

- make friends
- gain valuable life skills
- increase confidence
- be involved in making a real difference to the Borough of Stockton

To join or contact the group – look at our web page for further information or use the email address below:

www.stockton.gov.uk/BMBF

brightmindsbigfutures@stockton.gov.uk

Let's Take Action

The Let's Take Action (LTA) group is the Stockton-on-Tees Children in Care Council and gives children and young people the chance to shape and influence services and have a say on the things that matter to them.

The group is very active in trying to shape the services which are offered to children in care and their voice is so important as they have lived experience of being in care.

To join the group or find out more talk to your social worker.