



BEDFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL



Bedford Borough Council **Children's Services**

Participation Strategy for Children and Young People 2016 - 2017

This strategy and our principles of participation were developed with Children,
Young People and Staff across a range of Children's Services

Bedford Borough Council is committed to working with its communities and partners to improve local quality of life and to give children a brighter future. Working together with our partners, we are determined to make Bedford Borough a better place to live work and visit. There is a clear commitment to seek people's views and ensure we are sensitive to the needs and aspirations of others. Children's and Adults' Services are committed to creating a Borough where people of all ages, particularly the most vulnerable, are able to lead happy, independent lives and fulfil their potential. Services will be designed with the service user in mind. An overarching principle of Children's Services is to 'seek and actively respond to the views of children, young people and their families in order to improve the quality of services we deliver.'

The United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child makes it very clear that "Every child has the right to say what they think in all matters affecting them, and to have their views taken seriously".

This strategy is an important step towards supporting children and young people's entitlement to take part in decision making in Bedford. The aim of this strategy is to set out how we will achieve our vision.

Our current Member of Youth Parliament Rhianna May Duffy says:

"Children and young people have a right to a voice. Children and young people are in your generation. Children and young people can make a change. Letting our voices be heard, gives children and young people opportunities, motivation and inspiration. Our say should be heard as we are the next generation. We should decide how it goes".

Our Vision

The voices of children and young people should be at the heart of everything we do in Children's Services. Our aim is to ensure that their views inform how and what Services are provided for them and their families/carers. We want them to be fully involved in decisions about their lives whenever possible. When we have to make decisions on their behalf, their voices will have informed these decisions. We want children and young people to help us shape the way we plan and develop our Services.

What do we mean by Participation?

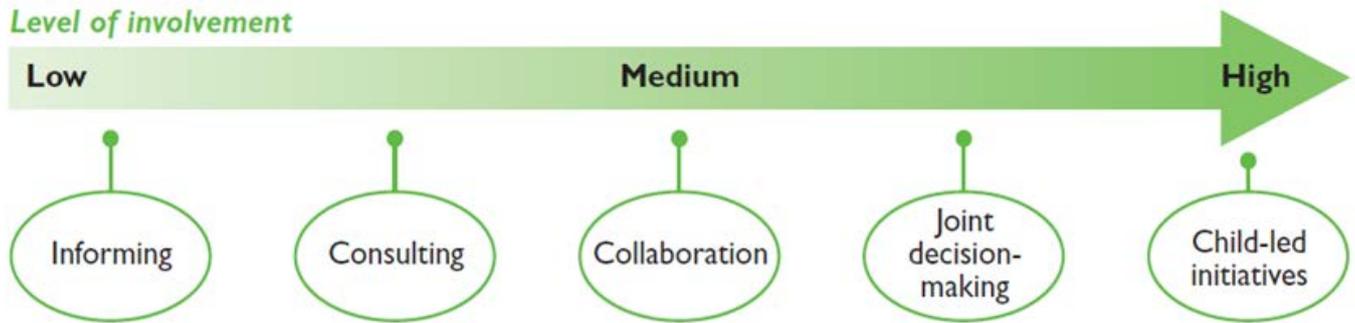
Traditionally the term 'participation' has been used to describe 'taking part' or 'being present', however, we use the term to describe children and young people being actively involved in decision making and bringing about or influencing change.

Participation can happen on many different levels and at many different times and it is important that we think about participation as a 'whole approach' embedded throughout our work. It is not just about consultation and asking for the opinions of or feedback from children and young people. It is not just about checking how children and young people feel about their situation and what is happening to them. It is not just a simple set of 'child-friendly' methods to engage with children and young people every now and then.

First, participation should include children and young people's involvement in individual decisions about their lives, as well as collective involvement in matters that affect them. Second, we should strive for a wider culture of listening that enables children and young people to influence decisions about the services they receive as individuals or as a collective on a day-to-day basis, as well as how those services are developed and delivered.

Model of Participation

There are many different models of Participation; the one we will use is the spectrum of participation. This model (The Spectrum of Participation by The International Association for Public Participation) highlights the different levels of participation and helps us to gauge the levels of involvement of young people in any area of Council activity.



<p>Adults make the decision on the project/piece of work and inform CYP about what it looks like and how it works.</p>	<p>The project/piece of work is designed and run by adults, but CYP are consulted for their views.</p>	<p>Adults have the original idea, but CYP are involved in every step of the planning and implementation. CYP can be involved in making decisions.</p>	<p>CYP have the ideas, set up projects and come to adults for advice and support. The adults do not direct, but offer their expertise for CYP to consider.</p>	<p>CYP have the initial idea and decide how the project is going to be carried out. Adults are available but do not take charge.</p>
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Good and meaningful participation allows children and young people to engage at a level that is appropriate to them at a time that is right for them. The spectrum will look different for each child and young person and will depend on the context of the situation and the needs of the children and young people, however this model promotes consistent approaches to participation.

For participation to become 'business as usual', staff need to create and nurture effective relationships with children and young people built on trust, honesty, understanding and communication.

Our principles of Participation

- 1) Children and young people choose to be involved (or not involved) to work on the things that are important to them at a level they choose. This involvement can be individual or as a collective via 'voice' groups and forums for example.
- 2) Information will be easy to understand for everyone. Adults working with children and young people will know what is going on and will be open, honest and clear when sharing this information.
- 3) Children and young people should have an equal opportunity to get involved. They should not be discriminated against, or prevented from participating effectively on the grounds of race, religion, culture, sexuality, disability, age, ethnic origin, language, where they live or the location of services.
- 4) We will provide feedback so that children and young people know the difference and impact their views and voices have made. We will make sure we respond to questions and queries from young people as quickly as we can.

- 5) We will work hard to make sure all views and opinions are heard and respected, we understand that even though people's opinions will be different they are all equally valid. Respect is very important to us.
- 6) We will evaluate our work with young people to make sure it improves and gets better for them.
- 7) Children and young people will enjoy and benefit from their engagement.
- 8) We believe that meaningful participation is everybody's responsibility: elected members, senior managers, staff, teams, services and our partners should work together to support and promote the participation of children and young people.
- 9) Services will proactively target children and young people who face the greatest barriers to getting involved and having their say.

How will we achieve our Vision?

We will examine current practice within Services and organisations and this will tell us where we are doing a good job of involving children and young people in decisions and where we could improve.

We will use the findings to inform Team Plans and the Improvement/Business Plan

We will develop the existing Participation Groups for children and young people and make sure that they are having an impact and that the governance arrangements make things happen. (See Engagement Framework)

We will change Service delivery in response to what young people say.

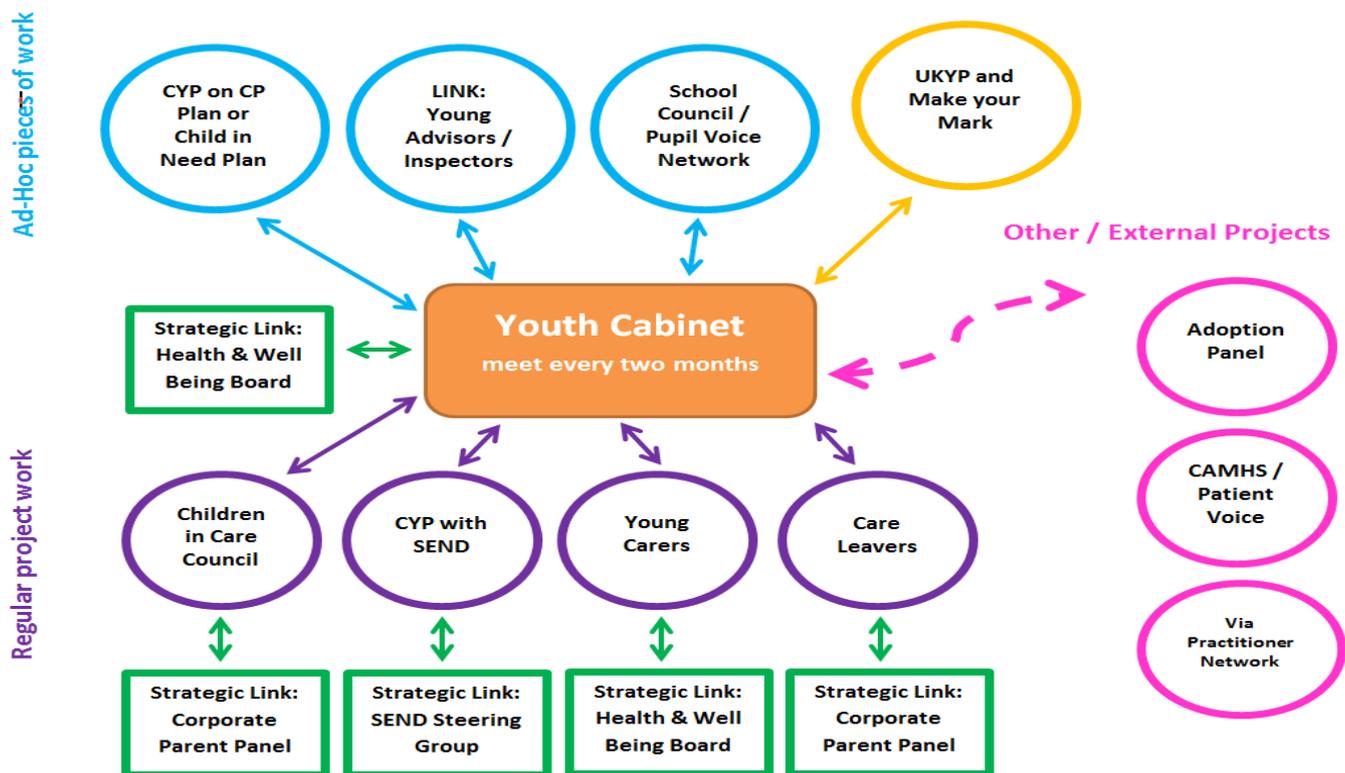
We will work in partnership with young people so that they can help set practice standards and hold us to account for how our Services are delivered and develop.

We will ensure that staff are trained, skilled and informed about their participation practice by providing service wide training, team specific guidance and support and provision of a 'Team Champions' network to share good practice.

We will make sure all relevant leaflets, publicity and resources are easy to understand and jargon free. We will have child friendly versions of key policies and staff.

We will use a range of ways to communicate with children and young people, including the safe use of social media.

Engagement Framework:



Outcomes/benefits of Participation

Meaningful participation carries many positive benefits; to the Children and Young People, the organisation and to local communities.

Benefits to Children and Young People:

- ✓ Opportunities to build on and learn new skills i.e. decision making, communication, debating and discussing, compromise and negotiation.
- ✓ Increase in confidence and self-esteem/self-worth; gaining a sense of achievement at their involvement and any impact this has.
- ✓ They have a voice and influence; they represent others, influence service provision and discussion and feel valued as a result.
- ✓ They become active citizens; co-creators of services and not just consumers. They develop a sense of ownership.
- ✓ They are able to build and maintain positive relationships with adults and other young people; they are able to work in partnership.
- ✓ They are empowered to make positive choices.

Benefits to the Organisation/Services:

- ✓ Improvement of service delivery; ongoing input and evaluation from young people will enable services to plan and deliver more effective services.
- ✓ Enables workers to build and maintain stronger relationships with children and young people built on a foundation of honesty, open communication and mutual respect.
- ✓ Policy, planning and service delivery is based upon actual rather than assumed needs.
- ✓ Increases sustainability of services/organisations.
- ✓ Effective delivery of governmental and legislative expectations.

Benefits to Local Communities:

- ✓ Early involvement of Children and Young People in decision-making promotes active engagement in communities later in life.
- ✓ Increased opportunities to bring communities together, increasing understanding and respect.
- ✓ Wider inclusion and representation of vulnerable groups.

How will we know that we are making a difference?

We will agree outcome measures to be used across Services to help us to measure impact.

More young people will participate and be involved in decision making

Young people will engage better with Services as they feel listened to.

We will do 'voice of the child' audits to help us monitor progress and develop our practice.

Who will make sure that all this is happening?

The participation groups will report to the Youth Cabinet who will have the overview of whether the Strategy is working. There will be regular reports to the Health and Wellbeing Board, Bedford Borough Local Children Safeguarding Board and Corporate Parenting Panel.

The Engagement and Development Team will report regularly to the Divisional Management Team who will make sure that this Strategy is making a difference within Children's Services.

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