



# Bedford Borough Council Participation and Engagement Strategy

2018 - 2021





## Our Commitment...

*“If it is about you; we don’t want to do it without you”*

Bedford Borough Council will embed a culture of participation where the voices, views, wishes, feelings and experiences of children and young people are at the very heart of everything we do.

# Foreword...

Children and young people are very clear; they are the experts in their own lives and feelings and they want the adults working with them to take the time to see the world through their eyes.

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 with our partners, we are determined to make Bedford Borough a better place to live, work and visit.

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.' We will ensure children and young people inform, influence and shape the support that is provided for them and their families. Services will be designed with the service user in mind, so we can empower them to be the best they can be.

This strategy and the messages within it are extremely important; we want to be a service with children and young people at its heart. We want to listen and we want to learn; we want children and young people to be our partners as we grow on our journey.

Signatures of: Cllr Hunt, Colin Foster and young people.

# Our principles...

Children and young people have told us that the **information** we give them, how we **communicate** with them and how having positive **relationships** with their workers are really important to them. We want to use these to help us with our participation principles...

Information	Communication	Relationships
<p>Information will be easy to understand, age appropriate and free of jargon and acronyms.</p> <p>We will make sure the views, wishes and feelings of children and young people will influence all assessments, plans and interventions.</p> <p>We will be honest with children and young people and tell them what is happening at every stage.</p> <p>It is children and young people's choice to have their say (or not) on the issues that are important to them.</p> <p>We will tell children and young people about their rights and how they can make a complaint, comment or compliment.</p> <p>We will also tell children and young people how they can access an advocate to support them to have their say.</p>	<p>We will keep in touch with children and young people and visit them on a regular basis. When we visit children and young people, we will see them alone and find out how they are feeling.</p> <p>We will make it easy for children and young people to get in touch with their workers. We will make sure we contact children and young people back promptly.</p> <p>We will be honest and realistic with children and young people about what can or can't happen or what might happen next for them.</p> <p>We will let children and young people know the difference their views and opinions have had. When a different decision has been made we will help children and young people understand why this has happened and answer any questions they may have.</p> <p>We will be creative in the ways we work with children and young people to make it as easy as possible for children and young people to share their views/feelings.</p>	<p>We will get to know our children and young people; how they feel, what they like and don't like and what they would like to happen.</p> <p>We will work hard to remove any barriers that stop children and young people getting involved and having their say.</p> <p>Respect is important to us; we understand that even though people's thoughts and feelings are different they will all be considered.</p> <p>We will keep asking children and young people how we can improve what we do. We will always evaluate our work so it keeps getting better.</p> <p>We will do what we say we are going to do; we will be honest with children and young people about any problems we might come across and talk them through any changes to plans.</p> <p>We believe that meaningful participation is everybody's responsibility; elected members, senior managers, staff teams, services and our partners will work together to promote and support the engagement of children and young people.</p>

# Our Model...

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 *influencing positive change*.

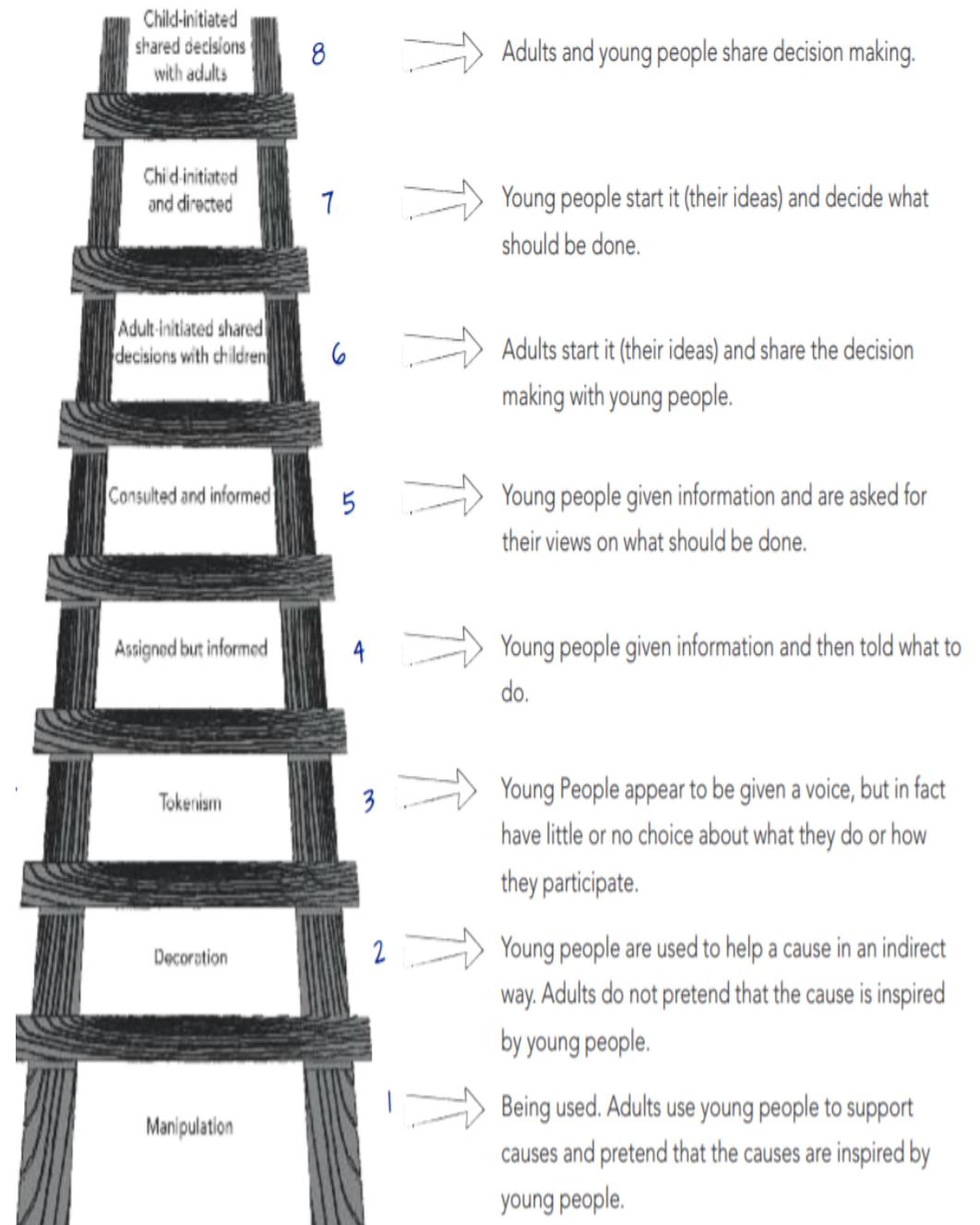
Therefore, participation is about giving children and young people the *opportunity to have their voices, views, wishes and experiences heard* and using these to shape how we plan and deliver our services. It also means that we will *empower children and young people to have a say in decisions about their own lives*.

The ladder of participation was developed by Roger Hart in 1992; the ladder identifies eight levels of children and young people's participation.

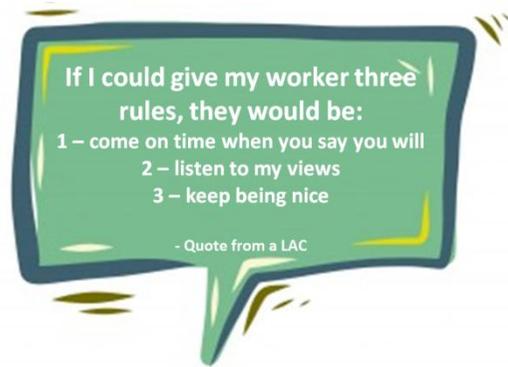
It is designed to encourage workers to think about how effective children and young people's participation is. It can also help us to identify and reduce practice that is seen as tokenistic, decorative or manipulative.

The bottom three rungs of the ladder are described as 'non-participation' and could be damaging to relationships with children and young people.

The ladder will look different for each child and young person and will of course change depending on the context of the situation; however for participation to be meaningful we need to understand the balance between children and adults in decision making.



# What it looks like in practice...



## For children and young people:

All children and young people will have the opportunity to participate in decisions that will affect or impact their lives.

Children and young people will help us recruit, select and induct staff at all levels throughout the service.

Children and young people will have co-produced plans, assessments and interventions; influenced by them, written with them.

There will be a number of engagement projects and opportunities for children and young people. These will give children and young people the opportunity to have their say and to meet key decision makers and hold them to account.

Children and young people will be empowered to take an active role and/or lead their meetings/reviews/conferences.

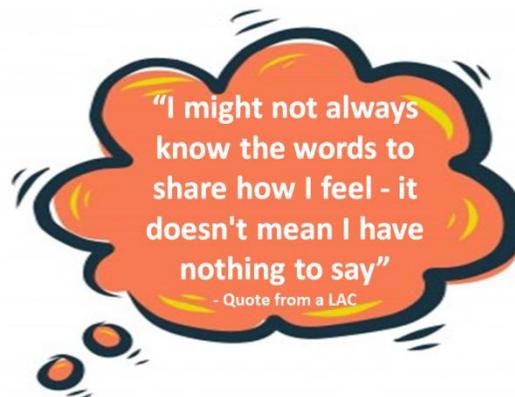
## For staff and workers:

Staff will have the skills, tools and abilities to communicate and positively work with children and young people.

Direct work with children and young people will be of a high quality, accessible and engaging. It will be meaningful and relevant to the child or young person. It will be recorded honestly and used to inform decisions.

When staff make decisions on behalf of children and young people, their voices, views, wishes and experiences will influence and inform these decisions.

Staff will feedback to children and young people. When a decision is made which may be different to the child or young person's views, wishes or feelings, staff will take the time to explain this to them and answer any questions they may have.



## Strategically:

There will be clear governance structures in place to ensure children and young people have access to senior managers, elected members and decision makers.

Managers and elected members will ensure a culture of engagement and participation is embedded throughout services and the work we do.

Quality Assurance activity will continue to evaluate and measure the impact of direct work and the quality of involvement of children and young people throughout all work. The results of this activity will influence performance and service development.

Service design and delivery activity will be co-produced with children, young people and their views, wishes and feelings at the forefront.

# The benefits of Participation & Engagement...

## **Benefits of participation for 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.
- They can make changes for other children and young people and challenge and hold decision makers to account.

## **Benefits of participation for organisations and services:**

- Plan, create and shape better quality services that meet the needs of children and young people.
- Helps make sure money is spent in a better and more efficient way.
- Improve attendance, co-operation, attainment and behaviour.
- Help to improve the quality of life for children and young people by having services that recognise, understand and respond to their actual rather than presumed need.
- Bring new perspectives and influence outcomes to improve services and organisations.
- Workers are able to develop and maintain stronger relationships with children and young people built on a foundation of honesty, open communication and mutual respect and understanding.

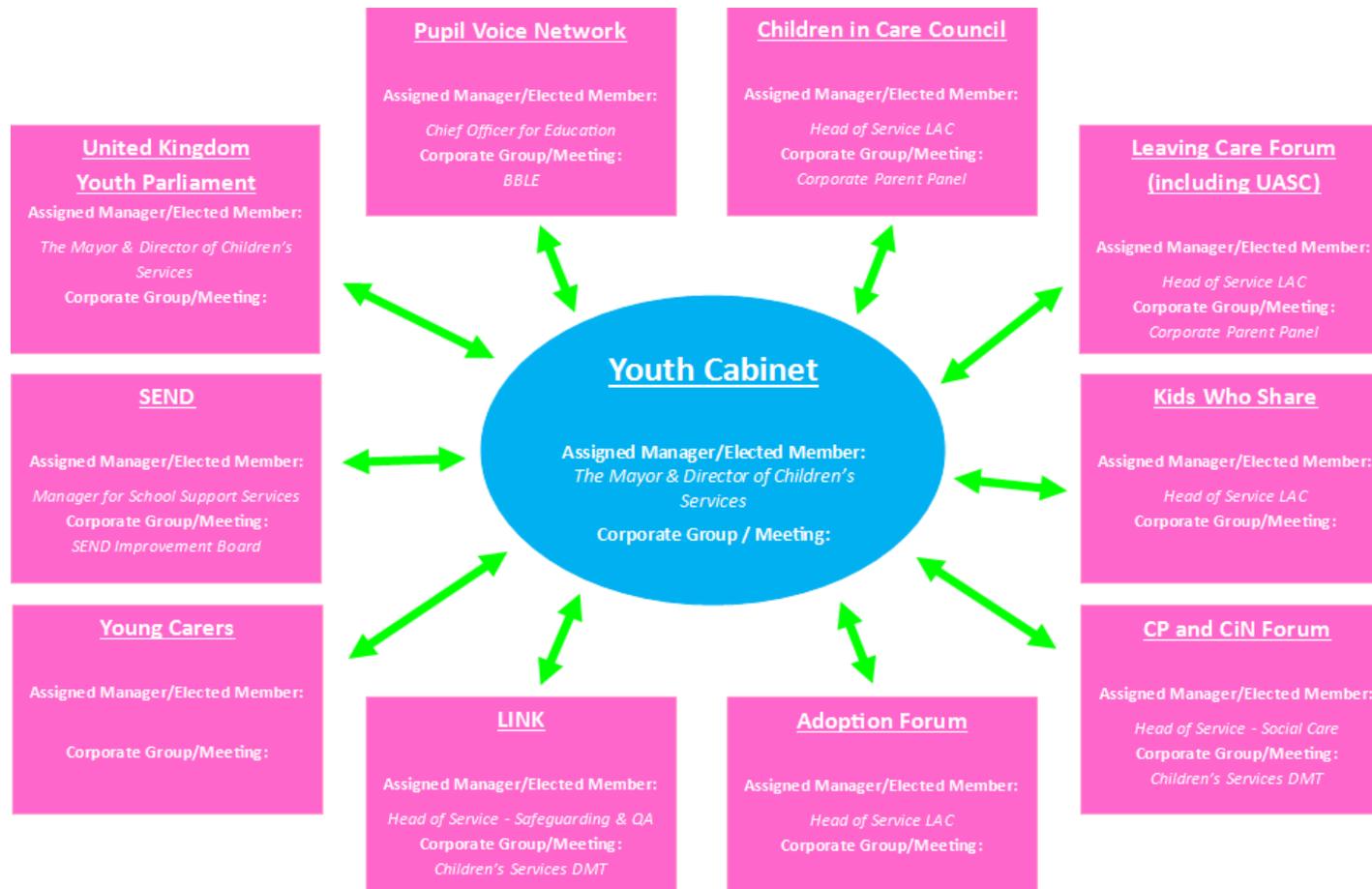
## **Benefits of participation for local communities:**

- Promotes active citizenship and ownership so children and young people feel valued and respected.
- Improves the quality of life for children and young people their local communities.
- Increased opportunities to bring communities together to work with and for each other, increasing understanding and respect.
- Wider inclusion and representation of vulnerable groups which can help dispel negative stereotypes of children and young people.

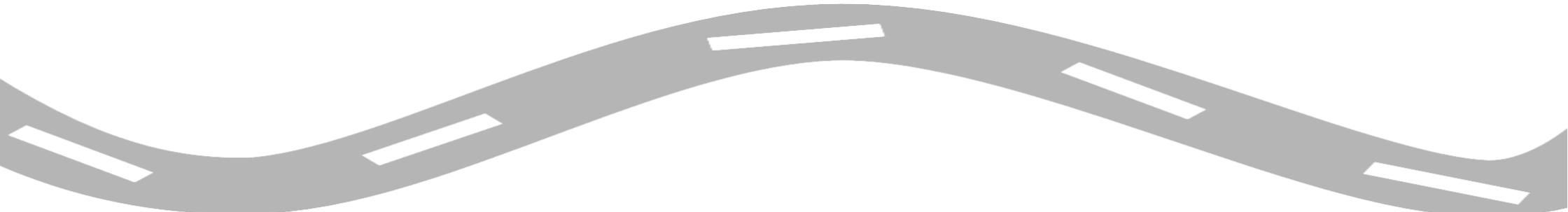
# Governance...

To ensure the voices, views, wishes, feelings and experiences of children and young people are having a positive impact and to allow children and young people to hold decision makers to account, it is vital to have effective and accessible Governance Structures. This Governance Structure will allow Children and Young People to meet directly with key decision makers and contribute to decision making mechanisms. It will also ensure the voices, views, wishes, feelings and experiences are heard at the highest possible level to influence change. Strategic links can vary in how they look; it may be a regularly submitted report, children and young people becoming co-opted members of panels and groups, regular meetings with the chair or senior manager or children and young people attending the meeting. A meaningful method needs to be established.

All groups will have an assigned Manager and link to a Corporate Panel or Forum. All groups will feed into the Youth Cabinet via representation from young people. The Youth Cabinet will be open to any young person in Bedford Borough to join and will have 'allocated seats' for groups from within the voluntary sector.



# How will we know we have made a difference...



	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Outcomes at year one</b>	<b>Outcomes at year two</b>	<b>Outcomes at year three</b>
<b>Service and Strategic</b>	Service design and delivery			
	Recruitment and selection of staff			
	Representation/attendance on corporate/strategic boards and meetings			
	Commissioning of services			
	Inspection and evaluation of services			
	Delivery of training			
	Evaluation / appraisal of staff			
	Policy writing and evaluation			
	Employment opportunities			
	Quality assurance and audits			
<b>Individual</b>	Individual assessments (across services)			
	Care planning			
	Interventions delivered			
	Placement planning			
	Reviews and conferences			
	Budget and finances			