

### Children & Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee

15 January 2019

### Children & Young People's Participation & Engagement Strategy 2019-2023

#### Recommendations:

- (1) That the Committee comments on the strategy which acts as the overarching participation strategy for children and young people working with and for Warwickshire County Council.
- (2) That the Committee notes that the strategy widens participation to include Child Protection and Children in Need
- (3) That the Committee promotes and facilitates the participation of children and young people with Warwickshire County Council, and its partners where possible.

#### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Warwickshire County Council has been involved with the participation of children and young people for a number of years but, prior to the Participation Strategy agreed and initiated in June 2014, participation activities had been more basic and without clear direction and structure.
- 1.2 Children and young people are one of the largest groups of people who use council services. There is a clear responsibility for adults to listen to children and young people's wishes and feelings. Especially when decisions made by adults affect children and young people's lives.
- 1.3 Involving children and young people in how and what services are delivered to them provides a multitude of benefits including: volunteering opportunities, confidence building, learning new skills and a better understanding of the democratic process, as well as saving time and money on extraneous services.

#### 2. Review of Participation Strategy 2014 – 17

- 2.1 The Participation Strategy 2014 – 17 defined participation, set out values and principles of participation, outlined standards for good practice and gave examples of how children looked after and young people (CLA&YP) could engage with children's social care services. The Participation Strategy was

designed to raise awareness of staff and to promote positive working practices that take on board views of CLA&YP. The Participation Strategy had also been translated into an action plan which helped to establish and identify a shared understanding of 22 key areas for improvement for the service.

- 2.2 The 2014-17 action plan was broad and ambitious because of the wide ranging areas of work identified for development. Much of 2014/15 focused on awareness, promotion and implementation of working agreements, arrangements and structures. In 2015/16 momentum was picked up in respect of improving numbers of CLA&YP to engage with the service. Over 2016/17 engagement practices with CLA&YP continued to be expanded.
- 2.3 Whilst progress on the action plan has been uneven across the 22 areas over the duration of this strategy, there has been positive movement in all 22 key areas identified for improvement.
- 2.4 The Participation Strategy had proved successful in shifting some of the culture of the service, by raising awareness with staff on the importance of engaging CLA&YP in service activities. The profile of the young people forums and groups is high and provides a model of good practice of engagement with CLA&YP within the service. There is a positive willingness on the part of staff (and foster carers) to support CLA&YP in participation activities, whereas, previously the potential benefits or time to engage CLA&YP may not have been as obvious or apparent.
- 2.5 However, despite progress there remain challenges of a more detailed and complex nature. There is a risk that participation activities are not being imbedded, can become ad hoc, picked up as an afterthought, as opposed to being a planned and considered part of the work of the service. Service managers need to be supported to think of creative ways in which participation activities can be absorbed within their service areas. In addition, the Participation Strategy 2014 - 17 did not consider or address the needs of C&YP within Child Protection and Children in Need.
- 2.6 These challenges need to be carefully explored and strategies more clearly defined to enable working practices to build upon and extend beyond the changes introduced to date.

To take a simple example, recruitment practices involve CLA&YP regularly at management level. This practice now needs to be extended to encourage managers towards self-sufficiency, simultaneously cascading and embedding this practice to all levels of the service. The culture exists to enable this to happen. Such areas of work should now be the focus of the next Participation and Engagement Strategy and action plan.

2.7 The Participation Strategy has enabled a good platform from which to take stock and re-visit the vision going forward.

### **3. Children & Young People Participation & Engagement Strategy 2019 – 2023**

3.1 As the previous strategy now needs refreshing, WCC staff have co-produced a new 5 year strategy with children and young people in Warwickshire. The new Early Help strategy covers the time period 2019 – 2023 so it is proposed that the participation strategy also covers the same time period to better coordinate strategies affecting children and young people.

3.2 The previous strategy predominantly focused on the participation of children looked after but with the increasing numbers of children subject to child protection plans and children in need it was decided to explicitly include these children and young people in the 2019-23 strategy.

3.3 The 2019-23 strategy sets out a commitment from senior leaders within WCC and representative bodies of children and young people to ask children and young people what they think about the services we provide for them and include them in our decision making.

3.4 Warwickshire children and young people define participation as ‘to join and work together [with adults] to make things happen that we [children and young people] want’. The network of youth groups in Warwickshire involved in participation include Children in Care Council, Care Leavers Forum, Warwickshire Youth Council and Members of the Youth Parliament.

3.5 Children and young people have set out their priorities for what they feel is important for Warwickshire County and partners to address which are laid out in the strategy document. When asked to name their number 1 priority they chose mental health.

3.6 The themes are currently named along the ‘Every Child Matters’ terminology and senior leaders have asked if young people can develop their own names for these themes over the coming months.

3.7 There have been some great achievements as part of the 2014-17 strategy, but there are also situations where work has not been co-ordinated properly, which has meant that some important messages from children and young people have been missed, and not shared or acted on, by council staff. Often children and young people are only asked what they think about council services. This approach does not always provide an opportunity for children and young people to work alongside adults to design council services. The 2019-23 strategy sets out 9 work areas that need improvement: recruitment,

training, communication, commissioning, quality assurance, incentives for young people, having a say in what we do, learning from others, campaigns.

- 3.8 WCC has made a commitment to putting children and young people at the heart of everything we do. To make sure that everyone who works for us does this, we will ask them to think about the following questions when planning their work: How do you listen and collect feedback on C&YP who use your service?, What do you do with the information they tell you?, What does this tell you about the service you provide to children and young people? How have you changed (or will you change) what you do as a result?, How do you make sure that the way you change services is fed back to children and young people?
- 3.9 A strategy needs an action plan to make sure what we think needs doing gets done and to measure ourselves against something to know we have made a difference. Our measures are: children and young people say they feel more listened to than before the strategy began, managers and workers can provide evidence that children and young people's views have been listened to and acted on and children and young people say services are now better than they were before the strategy began.
- 3.10 Young people should be aware of the action plan so they are able to monitor whether the changes are really taking place and are able to feedback where there are still improvements to be made. Where improvements are made Warwickshire will celebrate its achievements.

#### **4. Action planning**

- 4.1 To progress the strategy and develop an action plan, a Participation Advocate Network has been set up. Members are drawn from multiple teams and Business Units and act as advocates for participation in their circles of influence.
- 4.2 The network's main purpose is to motivate Operational Managers/Service Managers to improve on how their service listens and collects information on the Voice of the Child/Young Person and encourage them to make improvements to their service planning, design and delivery as a result of information received from children and young people
- 4.3 Ops Managers were asked to complete a Participation Self-Assessment to understand what their teams are currently doing and what they understand by participation. Young Advisors are in the middle of meeting all the Ops Managers to discuss the self-assessment to identify strengths and areas of development.

- 4.4 From these meetings the Ops Manager and Young Advisor will agree 5-10 key actions/changes that the team will introduce over the 5 years of the participation and engagement strategy (1 or 2 a year). The proposed actions/changes will be in response to the voice of the child/young person and will be added to the Practice Improvement Log, managed by Jenny Butlin-Moran.
- 4.5 Young Advisors will meet with the Ops Managers every 3 months and provide regular updates to SLT, including an annual progress review each year of the strategy.
- 4.6 This is just the start of the action planning process and the Participation Advocate Network will look at how we can widen the remit to include the whole Children and Families Service, the wider county council e.g. Education and Learning, and partners where possible.

## **5. Instilling a culture of participation**

- 5.1 The Participation Advocate Network is not a closed group and will welcome all participation advocates to instil a culture of participation across the Children and Families Business Unit, as well as across WCC as a whole, and partners where possible. Participation brings so many benefits to those children and young people who participate and to professionals who listen to them that encouraging more participation through the strategy action plan will bring even greater benefits to those who engage.

## **6. Next Steps**

- 6.1 Continue to meet with Ops Managers to develop the action plan
- 6.2 Young Advisors to present action plan to SLT in March 2019
- 6.3 Monitor progress on action plan throughout 2019
- 6.4 Review action plan by March 2020.

## **7. Appendix**

Draft Children and Young People's Participation & Engagement Strategy 2019-23

## **8. Background papers**

Participation Strategy 2014 – 17

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Local Member(s): N/A

Other members:

Cabinet Portfolio Holder: Councillor Jeff Morgan

Committee Chair and Spokespersons: Councillors Yousef Dahmash (Ch), Jonathan Chilvers, Corinne Davies and Jerry Roodhouse.

# CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION & ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY 2019-23



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# OUR COMMITMENT:

## “WE WILL DO OUR BEST.”

**Warwickshire County Council workers ask children and young people what they think about the services we provide for them:**

- What is the best way to listen to children and young people and get their ideas across to adults who make decisions about council services?
- What works?
- What doesn't?
- What could we do better?
- What changes do we need to make?

We make a commitment to young people taking part in a meaningful way in decisions which impact on their lives.

Most decisions about what we provide for children and young people in Warwickshire are made by adults.

Decisions made by these adults have a big effect on the lives of children and young people now and in the future.

This is why it is very important to make sure we listen and take action on what children and young people say about what we are doing for them.

The whole of Warwickshire County Council will do its best to make sure that children and young people's voices are heard.

We will do our best to include children and young people's views and ideas into our everyday work, especially when we make changes to the services we provide.

**Councillor Jeff Morgan**

*Portfolio Holder for Children's Services*

**Nigel Minns**

*Strategic Director, People Directorate*

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**John Coleman**

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**Children In Care Council**

**Care Leavers Forum**

**Warwickshire Youth Council**

**Members of Youth Parliament**

# WHAT IS PARTICIPATION AND WHY SHOULD WE DO IT?

There are many explanations of what we mean by 'children and young people's participation'.

"The involvement of children and young people in decision making on issues which affect their lives\*"

#### Survey supported by

- the Children's Right Alliance for England
- the National Children's Bureau
- Participation Works and
- the Children's Commissioner

*\*Children's Participation in Decision-making - survey of Participation Workers. Written by Dr Ciara Davey, Jo Lea, Catherine Shaw and Tom Burke*

Children and young people in Warwickshire describe participation as,

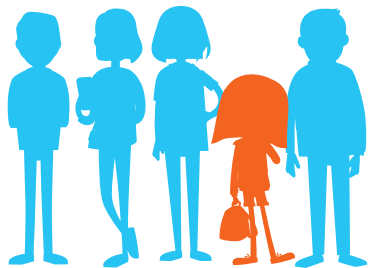
"To join and work together [with adults] to make things happen that we [children and young people] want"

#### It is important to understand that:

Children and young people aged under 18 make up

**1 in 5**

of the population in the United Kingdom



Children and young people are one of the largest groups of people who use council services.

For this reason we believe there are some simple **standards** that adults must follow when working with children and young people.

#### Standards to follow:

##### Respect

Children and young people should be given the time and space to say what they think

##### Fairness

Children and young people should have a bigger say in decisions that affect their future

##### Honesty

Children and young people should be told the truth, even if it's bad news

##### Value

Children and young people's input should be given importance, regardless of their age, or your age

##### Working Together

Children and young people can save time and money if you provide them with what they want

# WHAT IS THE NATIONAL AND LOCAL SITUATION?

**There are clear laws and rules which mean children and young people's opinions and views must be taken into account when adults make decisions which affect children and young people, for example:**

**The United Nations** explains in the *Declaration of Human Rights Article 12*, children's rights on education, good nutrition, health care, protection and shelter

**The British government** makes laws to protect children's rights. For example, the Children Act

**The Office of the Children's Commissioner** supports the rights, views and interests of children and young people

*As well as laws and rules there are charters, offers and pledges that make promises to listen to children and young people. For example: 1. The Warwickshire Pledge // 2. Care Leaver's Charter // 3. Care Leaver's Offer // 4. SEND Code of Practice*



## Warwickshire has a long history of workers listening to children and young people.

**The Warwickshire Children and Families Service's** motto is "Putting children at the heart of all we do". This includes planning and designing council services.

**The Senior Leadership Team** for this service is expected to show how they listen to the views of children and young people as part of their work and planning.

**The Warwickshire Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee** expects workers who provide council services to listen to the views of children and young people.

*We can't always provide what children and young people want, but need to give explanations when we can't.*

**These youth groups are chosen by children and young people. They educate adults about issues important to children and young people:**

- Children in Care Council
- Care Leavers Forum
- Warwickshire Youth Council
- Warwickshire Members of the Youth Parliament

# CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PRIORITIES

Children and young people across Warwickshire have helped put together a list of things that are important to them (Priorities) in the table overleaf.

These priorities will be changed into an 'Action Plan' (a list of things to change).


This Action Plan will support Warwickshire to make council services better for children and young people.

The Children and Young People's Priorities are grouped into **themes**:

1. **Be Healthy** – make healthier choices for yourself
2. **Stay Safe** – know how to keep yourself safe
3. **Enjoy & Achieve** – take part in things and do well in things that interest you
4. **Make A Positive Contribution** – do useful things to help others
5. **Achieve Economic Well-being** – earn money so that you can manage comfortably

The Children and Young People's Priorities have been put together by connecting issues that children and young people voted for through Children in Care Council elections, Warwickshire Youth Council and Members of Youth Parliament.

*Their number 1 priority was mental health*

Outcomes	Themes	Children & Young People's Priorities
 <b>Be Healthy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mental Health</li> <li>Emotional Support</li> <li>Someone To Talk To And Listen To You</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We should learn about mental health issues and work to address stereotypes and improve services</li> <li>We need better information on what is available for us</li> <li>We need better support and access for us to mental health services</li> </ul>
	Time With Family Friends And Relatives	We should have a regular way of communication with people that are important to us.
	Young Carers	Increase funding and support for young carers
 <b>Stay Safe</b>	Bullying/Peer Pressure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We want to feel safe (especially online) and in schools</li> <li>We want to be supported by someone we trust</li> <li>We want support to deal with difficult situations</li> </ul>
 <b>Enjoy &amp; Achieve</b>	Education And Qualifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We need more support into employment that moves us into long term worthwhile jobs</li> <li>We need more support into further education. For example: for children &amp; young people with disabilities: help finding new schools after exclusion or moving, sixth form, colleges and universities</li> <li>We need more information about alternative routes into jobs, rather than the usual ones like college and university</li> </ul>
	Wider Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We need a wide ranging curriculum that teaches us important life skills so that we can be as independent as an adult. For example: sustainable living, taxes, political education, education on laws, sex education and health</li> </ul>
 <b>Make A Positive Contribution</b>	Life Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We need to be better prepared for adulthood and adult life</li> <li>We need to be shown and trained how to cook, clean, wash, shop, manage money, etc.</li> </ul>
	Equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We need to raise awareness of equality issues</li> <li>We need to be treated more respectfully and seen as valuable members of society with something unique to bring to the discussion</li> <li>We need you to listen, and make young people feel that their opinion is valued</li> <li>We need more positive stories about young people</li> </ul>
	Voting	Give 16 and 17 year olds the right to vote in all elections and referendums (one off vote)
 <b>Achieve Economic Well-being</b>	Better Access To Work Experience/ Hard To Find /Better Advertisement	We should have the support to do at least a week's placement at a place of our choice
	Living Wage	No one should be paid less than the Living Wage
	Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make public transport cheaper better and accessible for all</li> <li>Provide better information about travel passes and discounts</li> </ul>

# WHERE ARE WE NOW?

# WHERE ARE WE GOING?

There is some good work going on in Warwickshire where the 'voice of the child' is listened to and directly changes how council services are provided to children and young people.

**There are a number of groups that meet regularly with workers, such as:**

**Children in Care Council:** is there for children who are 'looked after' or are 'care leavers'. Warwickshire has worked with the Children in Care Council to develop a Warwickshire Pledge, these are promises Warwickshire has made to children and young people.

**Care Leavers:** have something called a 'Local Offer' which explains their rights and also includes in it young people's right to take part in participation activities that interest them.

**Warwickshire Youth Council:** act as a voice for young people from all over Warwickshire.

**Members of Youth Parliament:** are young people voted for through elections in Warwickshire to represent their local area in the Youth Parliament.

**The council also engages with children and young people with disabilities or special educational needs (SEN) on a project basis through special school councils and short break groups.**

**But, there are also situations where work has not been co-ordinated properly, which has meant that some important messages from children and young people have been missed, and not shared or acted on, by council staff.**

Often children and young people are only asked what they think about council services. This approach does not always provide an opportunity for children and young people to work alongside adults to design council services.

This is a lost opportunity for Warwickshire.

There are a number of changes needed to get children and young people more closely involved with workers to shape future council services.

**We believe there are 9 work areas that need improvement:**

	<b>Work Area</b>	<b>Where are we now?</b>	<b>Where are we going?</b>
<b>1</b>	Recruitment: having a say in who gets the job	Young people are on some recruitment panels	Young people should be on recruitment panels where the job has contact with, or makes direct decisions about, young people
<b>2</b>	Training: helping adults to understand how to communicate with children and young people	Some young people have an input into some training	Young people should create, present, and assess training for people who work face to face, or make decisions about, young people
<b>3</b>	Communication: having a clear conversation	How information is shared with young people varies. Young people need to know how to share information with us	Define more clearly how information should be shared and fed back. Better planning and use of social media
<b>4</b>	Commissioning: companies who are paid to deliver services for young people	Young people are giving their views in parts of the commissioning process	Young people should be involved appropriately in the whole process where services are used by them
<b>5</b>	Quality Assurance/Mystery Shopping: testing how good services are	Some services are quality assured by young people	Young people should work with adult quality assurers to assess services that have been set up for young people
<b>6</b>	Recruiting/Rewarding/ Incentives for young people: supporting young people to make things happen	Recruiting or rewarding young people is not consistent	Opportunities for young people into full time employment should be clearly identified and promoted, such as apprenticeships. Clearer rewards policy
<b>7</b>	Having a say in what we do: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning and Design</li> <li>• Delivery</li> <li>• Feedback</li> </ul> Work together with young people	The voice of young people is not consistently collected and used	Young people should always be involved in 'Planning - Doing - Reviewing' with senior Leaders. Leaders should evidence what we do differently as a result
<b>8</b>	Regional, national and annual events: Learning from others	Young people attend the same events	Support young people to attend a wider range of events with adults. Use young people's feedback to make decisions
<b>9</b>	Campaigns: introduce a change in attitudes in the workplace	Young people need stronger working relationship with leaders	Senior leaders to champion and resource young people's priorities

# MAKING THIS HAPPEN - HOW WILL WE GET THERE AND WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

Warwickshire has made a commitment to **“putting children and young people at the heart of everything we do”**.

To make sure everyone who works for Warwickshire does this, we will remind staff to think about the following questions when planning their work.

“How do you listen and collect feedback from children and young people who use your service?”

We must ask children and young people about the best way for them to tell us about council services we provide them.

“What do you do with the information they tell you?”

We must understand and act on the information that children and young people share with us.

“What does this tell you about the service you provide to children and young people?”

We must build up a picture of what children and young people are saying about what we do and how well we do it.

“How have you changed (or will you change) what you do as a result?”

We must find better ways of doing things and take the advice of children and young people on what those changes should look like.

“How do you make sure that the way you change services is fed back to children and young people?”

We must tell children and young people what has changed, when, how and why. We should check how well the new changes are working.

These questions will help people who work for us plan alongside children and young people.

It will assist them in changing council services according to the views and opinions of children and young people.

The voices of children and young people should be listened to all the time, not just when big changes are planned.



# WHAT'S NEXT?

This Participation and Engagement strategy will need an **Action Plan** to make the changes children and young people have asked for.

The Action Plan will be put together by managers, workers and young people.

The work area is something they believe is worth changing based on feedback from children and young people (children and young people say they are dissatisfied with how things are now).

The solutions are better options and easy to understand (they are clear on how to solve the problem).

The actions are realistic (they believe that they can be done)

**Managers, workers and young people will need to make sure that:**

## **How do we know we have made a difference?**

- Children and young people say they feel more listened to than before the strategy began
- Managers and workers can provide evidence that children and young people's views have been listened to and acted on
- Children and young people say services are now better than they were before the strategy began

## **Action Planning**

Young people should be aware of the Action Plan so they are able to monitor whether the changes are really taking place and are able to feedback where there are still improvements to be made.

Where improvements are made Warwickshire will celebrate its achievements.

