
A Strategy for the Involvement of Children and Young People in Sheffield

2014-2016

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states:

“Children and young people have the right to say what they think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect them and have their opinions taken into account”

Introduction

Looking back – a review of the previous strategy

In 2008 Sheffield launched its Involvement Strategy for Children and Young People for 2008-11. The 2008 strategy, informed by children and young people, set out why involving children and young people in decision making processes was important and outlined how we were going to achieve this.

There have been many examples of excellent practice relating to opportunities for children and young people's involvement. The key achievements arising from the 2008-11 strategy include:

Structures

We now have some core involvement structures functioning effectively, though in isolation, at a number of levels, for example school councils, area youth forums and a youth cabinet. We also now have involvement structures for children and young people from communities of interest who are represented on and link into these core structures, for example a Children in Care Council, a young carers' steering group and two Young Inspector groups, inspecting positive activities for children and young people in the city.



Sheffield Youth Cabinet, 2014

Consultation

We now have an increased number of organisations commissioning and carrying out consultation activity to feed into their service planning, delivery and evaluation. We also carry out an annual Every Child Matters consultation with pupils from across the city.

Participation standards

Partners have worked together to develop a set of simplified standards for organisations to self-assess their involvement practice. The standards are in line with the national Hear By Right involvement standards and are now ready to be used to support organisations evaluate and improve how they involve children and young people.

Skills of children and young people

We now have access to a range of training packages, tools and techniques that children and young people have engaged in. These range from formal accredited training packages to ongoing opportunities for children and young people to develop their skills and confidence and, for some, increased access to volunteering and employment opportunities, through experiential learning, peer support and group or individual activities.

Skills of the children and young people's workforce

We now have a range of involvement training offers available to the children and young people's workforce across a range of service providers. Involvement training is a key priority within many partner organisations and included in some service and workforce development plans. It is now a key training module for all Children and Families Social Care staff across the city. Partners have developed a range of training packages and on the job learning opportunities and we have developed a range of nationally recognised toolkits and resources to support these.



The Children's Involvement Team deliver Communi-crate training to members of the children and young people's workforce

Looking forward

Following an evaluation and review of the previous strategy's outcomes, this new strategy refreshes Sheffield's approach and sets out how we will continue to support children and young people's involvement throughout the city. It aims to build on existing best practice and extend opportunities for young people that are more accessible and inclusive. It also highlights how professionals can access support and information.

Through the new strategy, we will:

- Create stronger links between involvement structures for children and young people across the city and fill in any gaps in provision;
- Create a more joined up approach to consultation with children and young people to reduce duplication and over consultation;
- Produce a set of standards for organisations to use to measure their involvement work with children and young people through a self-assessment process;
- Create a flexible approach to involvement training of children and young people, ensuring access to a wide range of opportunities for all;
- Increase training opportunities available to the children and young people's workforce, ranging from basic involvement training to techniques and approaches targeting specialist groups.

Through the implementation of this strategy, our vision for children and young people in Sheffield is that by 2016 they will:

- Have a voice in their community and their city by being involved in decision making processes and having accessible routes to voice their views;
- Influence the way services are planned, delivered and evaluated by expressing their views both as individuals and as part of groups, such as school councils and forums;
- Be seen as individuals, having their diversity recognised;
- Have their voices heard within adult-led democratic processes, both as individuals and as part of a group;
- Be listened to and treated with respect;
- Have their rights met and feel empowered to exercise all their rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

This strategy demonstrates how we will make this vision become a reality.

What do we mean by involvement?

For it to be meaningful, involvement must become part of all our everyday decision-making processes. From formal consultation to developing documents and policy through 'working groups', children and young people on interview panels as part of recruitment processes and decisions on planning activities in individual groups, involvement needs to be embedded into all our planning and delivery processes, as well as in the monitoring and evaluation of what we have achieved and the impact made.

The definition of involvement developed by young people and adopted by the Sheffield 0-19+ Partnership is:

Involvement is the way in which children and young people can be actively involved in decision making processes that affect not only their lives but the communities in which they live and the services they use.

Why involve children and young people?

In the current financial climate, public services need to improve the cost effectiveness of service delivery and provide better outcomes. The involvement of children and young people in decision-making processes in the communities and city they live in, the activities they take part in and the services that support them can help in achieving this and has a number of benefits to all involved in the processes.

Through involvement in decision-making, children and young people will:

- Feel respected and listened to and will learn to listen respectfully to others;
- Grow in confidence and self-esteem;
- Feel part of and play an active role in their community and the city they live;
- Learn and develop important life skills, such as problem solving, decision making, negotiation and listening;
- Develop social skills and a better understanding of the society they are part of;
- Understand and learn to respect different views and opinions and work together to find solutions.

Through involvement of children and young people in decision-making, organisations and services will:

- Be able to more effectively target resources into what children and young people actually want;
- See increased numbers of children and young people accessing services;
- Be able to enhance policies and practice with new ideas from children and young people based on their actual rather than perceived needs;
- Provide meaningful engagement with children and young people, developing and supporting positive relationships.

Through the involvement of children and young people in decision-making, communities will:

- Become more aware of children and young people's needs and be better equipped to address them;
- See improved relationships between children, young people and adult members of the community;
- See better designed facilities for children and young people.
- See more children and young people involved in community activities.
- See less bullying, vandalism and anti-social behaviour.



Members of North Youth Forum engage in a Q&A session with local councillors

The five elements of the strategy

The strategy is made up of five key elements:

Getting children and young people involved - structures

Structures will be in place to enable children and young people in Sheffield to engage in decision-making at a local, community assembly and city level.

Children and young people influencing services - consultation

Consultation will be delivered via a co-ordinated approach with children and young people across the 0-19+ Partnership.

Measuring the success of a service – involvement standards

Involvement standards are developed and publicised to support partner agencies.

The skills of children and young people

Training is developed and delivered to increase the skills of children and young people to enable them to fully engage in decision making processes.

Skills of the children and young people's workforce

Training is developed and delivered to underpin workforce development and enhance skills in listening and responding to children and young people and involving them in decision making processes.

All MAP members will have a role to play in the delivery of some or all of these elements. We will deliver this strategy by championing children and young people's involvement within our own organisations and using the diverse wealth of experience within the city and working together to achieve the strategy aims.

Getting children and young people involved - structures

With the increasing devolution of decision-making at a local level, it is important that children and young people are connected to local structures and decision-making processes, as well as to other city-wide, regional and national structures, in ways that are appropriate, enjoyable and meaningful.

Through the delivery of this strategy we will:

- Ensure there is a range of inclusive formal and informal structures and opportunities for children and young people to influence services. These will include core structures such as individual and joint school councils, local youth forums and a Sheffield Youth Cabinet, as well as other targeted structures.
- Improve and strengthen links between children and young people's structures and adult-led structures and processes through regular communication and joined-up approaches to democratic processes.
- Increase and strengthen links between children and young people's structures to enable their voices to be heard at appropriate levels and bring about positive change.
- Ensure that staff within the children and young people's workforce understand the structures for children and young people's involvement and know to direct children and young people and support them to access them.



***Young people from VOYCE
(Views of Young Carers Explained)***

Children and young people influencing services - consultation

Consulting with children and young people is critical to inform planning, evaluation and delivery of all services for children and young people. It is important that we discover children and young people's perceptions and priorities, collect their views of the services provided for them and input these findings into service planning. As a result of this, children and young people in Sheffield will feel confident and able to express their views in a way that is best for them, know they have been listened to and know change has happened as a result of the consultation.

Through the delivery of this strategy we will:

- Develop processes to support children and young people to have a say, or be consulted, on what matters to them
- Ensure that consultations are suitable for the children or young people they are aimed at, including targeted consultations for children and young people whose voice is often missed. We will support this through our own work and through training for the children and young people's workforce
- Establish a best practice process, based on the principles below, to ensure that children and young people are involved in meaningful, non-tokenistic consultations and receive feedback about the impact of their views
- Work together, wherever possible, to avoid any duplication or over consultation by establishing a single city-wide, multi-agency consultation website

All consultations will be based on the following principles:

- **Honesty** – be honest about the purpose of the consultation and what can or can't be changed
- **Communication** – use children and young people friendly language, avoiding jargon and think about the communication support needs of individual children and young people to enable them to fully participate
- **Realism** – commit sufficient time and resources to carry out the consultation, only giving commitments that can be honoured
- **Inclusion** – ensure that all children and young people can be involved, regardless of age, ability and experience, not just the most visible
- **Respect** – make sure that children and young people's voices are heard and acted on and give timely feedback
- **Recognition** – acknowledge the contribution children and young people have made through recognition and access to accreditation opportunities.

Measuring the success of a service – involvement standards

The Children and Young People's Involvement Strategy Group has worked closely to produce a set of standards to underpin involvement work with children and young people in Sheffield based on a national standards framework (Hear By Right). The standards provide guidance and a framework for agencies and organisations to improve levels of involvement.

Through the delivery of this strategy we will:

- Produce a simple set of involvement standards, in line with the national Hear By Right standards, for organisations to use to self-assess and subsequently improve their own practice
- Work within our own organisations as champions to promote self-assessment using the standards and provide support to develop an action plan
- Develop a partnership approach to training and support to support the use of the standards within organisations and agencies across the city linked to the self-assessment process.



Young people attend a Young Inspectors' training session

The skills of children and young people

In order to support children to fully engage in decision-making, children and young people will be supported individually and in groups to access opportunities to develop the skills and knowledge they need to feel confident in expressing their views and opinions to meaningfully engage in decision making.

Through the delivery of this strategy we will:

- Develop and publicise a range of training programmes available through different agencies within MAP that empower, equip and enable children and young people across Sheffield to become involved in a range of decision-making opportunities
- Develop a standard incentive model that, where appropriate, recognises, formally accredits and rewards the involvement of children and young people. This will also support the celebration of involvement work through praise, positive feedback and formal recognition of achievements, such as awards, celebration events and media coverage.

Skills of the children and young people's workforce

Central to embedding involvement is the establishment of an awareness raising and training and programme for the children and young people's workforce. The training programme will aim to build the skills, knowledge and capacity of staff to ensure that involvement is part of policy, planning and everyday practice.

Through the delivery of this strategy we will:

- Develop and publicise a range of training programmes for the children and young people's workforce to support the meaningful involvement and consultation of children and young people across Sheffield in the decisions that affect their lives. Through this, the children and young people's workforce will have the understanding, awareness, skills and confidence to engage children and young people in decision-making processes and effect organisational change

How the strategy will be delivered

This strategy will be delivered through the work of organisations represented in the Children and Young People's Multi Agency Involvement Group.

For further information on this strategy or the Children and Young People's Involvement Strategy Group, please contact:

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This strategy was developed by the Children and Young People's Multi Agency Involvement Group, formerly known as the Multi Agency Participation (MAP) Group, involving a range of organisations and agencies.