

Children and Young People's Participation and Co-Production Strategy 2019 - 2021



Our vision

In Wolverhampton we want children and young people to participate in the broadest sense of the word in issues, services and decisions that affect them. We want children and young people to co-produce policies, procedures, services and provision that affect them and their families.

The City of Wolverhampton Council wants to ensure young people are engaged, informed, consulted and have opportunity to initiate discussions about all aspects of the council. This strategy will support not only development of Children's Service, but also have a wider influence in the developments in the City, by the council and its partners. This influence will be at a local, regional and national level.

We want the children and young people of Wolverhampton to:

- have equal opportunity to meaningfully participate
- be involved in designing services of the future
- contribute to and benefit from involvement in their local communities
- feel that they are being heard and valued
- be able to make a difference
- improve their education and skills through participation opportunities

In Wolverhampton, this is what we mean when we talk about 'participation and co-production.

How we will achieve our vision

Using the above vision as the action points, SMART planning and monitoring will be used to measure the effectiveness of participation of children and young people in the design and development of services. This will include formal forums such as the Youth Council, B-Safe Group and Children in Care Council as well as other sub groups. This collective will be known as Wolverhampton's Youth Voice. School Councils and voluntary groups (who support the most vulnerable of our children and young people) will be actively encouraged to participate in the City's Youth Voice Forums as well as.

Children and young people will be supported and educated in their roles and responsibilities in being effective and representative of the community they represent.

Children and young people will be involved in the recruitment and selection processes of relevant staff and train and develop staff in areas of corporate interest in relation to the needs of children and young people.

The children and young people will develop ways of engaging other children and young people to have their voice heard in arenas where their knowledge and experience can influence decision makers.

The City of Wolverhampton Council will publicise the work of Youth Council and communicate with young people in Wolverhampton by utilising social media.

The children and young people will be consulted on Policy and Strategy developments from the Children and Young People's Service as standard practice.

The Children and Young People's Participation and Co-production action plan will accompany this strategy and be reviewed annually.

What does good participation and Co-production look like?

Participation is not just "taking part" or "being present" but about having influence over decisions and actions. Children and young people should be involved in the whole process of deciding the best services for all.

Children and young people should have a say in decisions about their own lives.

Services should be developed and improved, based on information we get from children and young people.

Why is this important?

There is evidence that everyone benefits from involving children and young people in decision making

- Children and young people
- Organisations
- The wider community

There are also laws and policies which ensure children and young people are involved in decision making.

Who will make sure all this is happening?

The Participation Team and Headstart Youth Engagement Team will be working with groups of children and young people and supporting them to ensure their voices are heard.

Their work will be monitored and evaluated by the young people, The Growing Well Board, SEND Challenge Board, Wolverhampton's Children and Young People Scrutiny Board and by the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People.

The City of Wolverhampton Council's Standards and Principles of Participation and Co-production.

- Children and young people have the right to participate or not. If they choose to participate, they have the right to understand their responsibilities.
- Young people should be the prime designers of the Participation and Co-Production Strategy.
- The City of Wolverhampton Council's Cabinet, Boards and Scrutiny Panels may work directly with the Wolverhampton's Youth Voice Groups.
- The City of Wolverhampton Council will provide a way for all children, young people and families in Wolverhampton to have a voice, to be heard by key decision makers and get as involved as they want to in be shaping what happens to them.
- The City of Wolverhampton Council will develop a way of making sure that children, young people and families can check whether their voice is being acted upon or not.
- The City of Wolverhampton Council will provide support to children, young people and families to ensure that they are equipped with the skills and knowledge to enable them to participate.
- Participation and Co-production should be delivered within Wolverhampton's equality and diversity policies or structures.
- There should be clear evidence of commitment to participation from members of the Growing Well Board, Safeguarding Children Board, City of Wolverhampton Council leaders, employees and other relevant partner organisations.
- Services should agree to the Hear by Right quality standards and codes of conduct for working with children and young people.
- Participation and Co-production should be embedded in strategic planning, delivery, commissioning, communication, business improvement activities, and recruitment.
- Opportunities and support should be provided to all employees and volunteers in order that they develop the skills and attitudes required to work effectively with children and young people.
- Children and young people's involvement should be valued. They should be treated honestly. This means that their expectations are managed, and they are helped to understand any practical, legal or political boundaries of their involvement.
- Children and young people's contributions (appropriate to their age and maturity), should be taken seriously and acted upon. There should be regular feedback from children and young people to confirm that this happens.
- Feedback to children and young people on the impact of their involvement should be timely and clear.

- Children and young people should have equal opportunity to get involved. They should not be discriminated against, or prevented from participating effectively, on grounds of race, religion, culture, sexuality, disability, age, ethnic origin, language, where they live, or the location of services.
- Services should proactively target those facing the greatest barriers to getting involved. For example, younger children, children and young people from minority ethnic backgrounds, those living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, children missing school, young people in the youth justice system, refugees, traveller children, and disabled children with special needs. Services should make sure that children and young people are aware of opportunities to have their say, and they should be encouraged and enabled them to use them.
- Children and young people are encouraged and supported to develop skills that enable them to contribute effectively, and to realise the benefits of doing so. Is gap too big here?
- Relevant information should be made available to children and young people. It should be at the right time, in the right format, no jargon, culturally appropriate and accessible.
- Policies and standards for participation and co-production should be provided, evaluated and continuously improved.
- Services should say from the beginning how they will know if they succeed listening to children and young people.
- Children and young people should be involved in reviewing lessons learned.
- The Participation and Co-production Strategy should be considered in partnership contracts and service level agreements with providers, whenever possible.
- Ensure that practitioners working with children, young people and families have the skills and knowledge to involve them effectively.



Wolverhampton's Youth Voice

Wolverhampton's Youth Council

The Youth Council is made up of young people elected by their school, community group or specialist service to contribute to the Council's development of services that effect young people, for example community engagement, health and wellbeing, children and young people and City developments. This is achieved by the inclusion of the group in the Council's scrutiny away days, and two seats being available on Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel and Community Cohesion Board.

The group meets monthly, but also incorporates task groups focusing on specific issues as highlighted by their agenda or that of the councils. It leads on Make Your Mark for the City and uses the outcome to influence scrutiny planning in the council. Workshops and training is completed with the group to ensure that the young people are well supported and skilled in tasks required of them. This group also engages in the national youth forums – two youth MPs and two Youth Crime Commissioners are elected through the group. The group holds an Annual General Meeting (AGM) and shares its annual reports with Council Leaders.

Wolverhampton's Children in Care Council

The Children in Care Council (CiCC) is made of young people aged 11-18 who are in care of the City Council, some live with foster carers, in residential homes, with friends and family carers or independently. These young people are nominated to become members of CiCC by their social workers, Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO), foster carers or other professionals who feel that young person would benefit from the skills acquired as part of the council. CiCC is a statutory requirement as laid down by the Care Matters White Paper 2007.

This group meets monthly. The young people complete induction training; interview training and some will complete the Total Respect Training. In addition to the group meetings, they meet twice a year with the Corporate Parenting Board. The CiCC work plan includes consultation on all of the reports sent to this board. This process is to ensure the experiences and opinions of the young people are embedded into service delivery and development. This group attends national forums through the National Children's Board (NCB) which advises on national policy.

Wolverhampton's Care Leavers Forum

The Care Leavers Forum (Care Leaver Independent Collective, CLIC) is made up of young people who are supported by the council leaving care team known as the Transitions Team. These young people are 18 -25 (depending on their educational status) and are either living independently, living with a host or staying put with foster carers. They are recruited to the forum through advertisements on Facebook, through their Young Person's Advisors (YPA) or social worker.

The group meets monthly and has its meeting combined with a peer support element as these young people can be very isolated. The formal part of the meeting is for an hour and half where they look at policy developments and service provision and give feedback to officers. This group also takes part in the National Care Leaver Covenant and National Benchmarking Forum which feeds into national policy development for Care Leavers.

Wolverhampton's B-safe Team HeadStart Ambassadors

The B-Safe Team is Wolverhampton's Junior Safeguarding Children Board, made up of local young people who get involved with safeguarding activities and decisions across the city.

The board enables the voice of Wolverhampton's young people to be heard and reflected in safeguarding business and activities, empowering young people to contribute to the processes and methods to keep them safe, and to increase awareness of safeguarding amongst parents and professionals.

HeadStart Ambassadors

HeadStart Ambassadors are aged 16 to 25 and assist with engaging young people to ensure that their voices are heard. The group works alongside the Headstart Programme to facilitate groups of young people aged 10-16 and support in the delivery of programmes and projects. Their role also includes sharing the views of young people with the professionals. HeadStart Ambassadors sit on the Headstart Shadow Board, a group of young people with genuine

decision-making power, and the power to challenge and support the leadership of HeadStart in delivering the very best for young people in the City.

Voices in Youth Justice

This group is made of young people who are experienced in the youth justice process in Wolverhampton. They meet monthly to look at ways in which the Youth Offending Team can support young people accessing this service.

They meet annually with the Youth Offending Management Board.

Wolverhampton Changing Our Lives

This group is made up of young people with special educational needs. They meet monthly to look at the Special Educational Needs Local Offer and attend focus groups for consultation.

To ensure the Local Offer is co-produced and includes young people's views, Wolverhampton Council have funded Changing Our Lives to work with children and young people with a range of disabilities and SEN to develop a Local Offer Communication Strategy.

Future Engagement in the life of the Strategy

During the life of this strategy further development of groups of young people affected by services provided by the council will be developed, it is hoped that resources on specialist groups will be an addition to this list, particularly with participation forum being delivered to Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children.

Benefits of participation

Consideration should be made in evaluating the need for:

- Rewards for involvement
- Accreditation of involvement
- Training for involvement
- Young people 'peer mentoring' children
- Partnership board members mentoring Youth Council members

Benefits for children and young people include:

- Personal development
- Improved self confidence
- Influencing decisions which affect their lives
- Development of a social network
- Feeling valued and empowered
- Better understanding of how organisations work and make decisions
- Involvement in commissioning services and recruiting staff
- Helping to monitor and evaluate services ('young inspectors')

Benefits for organisations

- Services are increasingly responsive to children and young people's needs and concerns
- Fresh perspectives and new ideas on services, policies and democratic processes
- Services and policies designed for actual rather than presumed needs
- Become more accessible to children and young people
- Become more efficient, as they provide a more effective service for children and young people
- Decision making improves and becomes more accountable
- Raises aspirations for all

Benefits for the wider community

- More vibrant local democracy
- Community cohesion
- An empowering environment
- Opportunities for increased political awareness and fair representation
- More children and young people involved in the democratic process.
- Children and young people have a greater opportunity to influence decisions.
- Children and young people will be more able to scrutinise political decisions that affect their lives.

Review

This is a 3 year strategy for the Council, to ensure its relevance, to monitor progress and influence the participation action plan, an annual review will consult with young people, employees and partners young people.