



# The Framework for Participation with Children and Young People in Kent



## Introduction

This framework document has been produced on behalf of the Kent Children's Trust. It provides a direction and an approach to participation with children and young people across the county. The framework is not prescriptive, as different types of participation are required in different contexts. However, it promotes an approach, including proposed standards, with the intention that all participation work is a positive and meaningful experience for all involved giving a valuable sense of learning for those taking part and the agencies and projects delivering services.

There is evidence of positive and emerging good practice in the county and it is proposed that this should be developed and shared so that all benefit.

The framework relates to participation and consultation with children and young people from 0-19 rather than parents and carers. Whilst it is important to engage and involve parents this will be addressed through the separate "Parent Support Strategy" currently being developed on behalf of the Kent Children's Trust. Although there are links between the views of children and their parents it is important that children and young people are heard and involved in their own right.



## Purpose

The purpose of this framework document is to promote a coherent approach to participation with children and young people across Kent. Increasingly organisations in the county are addressing the need to engage with children and young people. However, the developments have been piecemeal with some examples of emerging good practice whilst in other areas there is still a lot to achieve. Services and projects need to be able to demonstrate that children and young people have been involved and that services have changed as a result of that involvement. The aim is not to be prescriptive so that everyone is doing the same but rather to reach a position whereby it is the norm for children and young people to be engaged in and able to influence the planning, commissioning and evaluation of children's services in Kent.

Participation can be perceived as not simply taking part or being present but rather having some influence over the decisions and actions affecting children and young people. Meaningful participation is a process, not simply the application of isolated activities or events. Using this interpretation of participation, activities such as consultation and information sharing can be seen as aspects of the range of participation activity.

Participation can also be seen at a personal level with children or young people able to influence decisions in matters that affect them as individuals. At an individual level, there are occasions where a service is acting in "loco parentis" where a decision might

need to be taken that is considered in the child or young person's best interests. (The same as a parent at times having to make a decision that a son or daughter doesn't agree with). There may be concerns from some professionals involved that participation can lead to a blurring in understanding of who is making the final decision and which decisions are open for discussion. At the outset it is important to have clear parameters – the adults will retain responsibility for making a decision but the child or young person's views should still be heard and considered as part of the decision making.

Participation can also be considered in its broader context, with children and young people as a group, having input into for example, service planning and development.

The Every Child Matters: Change for Children programme states:

"Participation is about asking children and young people what works, what doesn't work and what could work better, and involving them on an ongoing basis, in the design, delivery and evaluation of services".

The DCSF defines participation as "having some influence over decisions and action".

## Background

There are now a plethora of national statutory requirements and guidance documents requiring children's services to involve children and young people. A few examples are:

- It is a right for children and young people to influence decisions that affect them. This right is enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in particular Article 12 of that Convention.
- Participation is a key theme of Every Child Matters.
- The National Service Framework for Children refers to "the views of children, young people and families being valued and taken into account in planning, delivery and evaluation".
- Section 176 of the Education Act 2002 requires that local education authorities and school governing bodies refer to statutory guidance on pupil consultation provided in "Working Together: Giving children and young people a say".
- The Children Act 2004 legislated for the appointment of a Children's Commissioner with a duty to promote the views and interests of children and young people.
- Various Department of Health documents have set an expectation that children and young people will be routinely involved in service development at both central and

local government and that this should not be tokenistic.

- Key themes of the "The Strong and Prosperous Communities – Local Government" White Paper are citizen engagement and making sure services are more responsive. It states "The White Paper supports the Government's already strong agenda to increase the engagement of children, young people and their families (including disabled children and young people and those with Special Educational Needs)." Elsewhere in the document, it refers to "involving citizens directly in designing, delivering or assessing a service – for example by co-opting a group of young people to help manage a youth centre."

The importance placed on participation is recognised in the Joint Area Review Process. A key component of the review process is to:

"Examine how local services gather and respond to the views of users, parents and carers and ensure they involve children and young people".

Whilst it is clearly important for services to adhere to the various requirements, perhaps the main reason for engaging with children and young people are the various benefits that can arise for children and young people themselves.

The benefits include:

- Better services by listening and responding to customers.
- Promoting citizenship and social inclusion.
- Personal development for children and young people.

Experience from within Kent recognises how children and young people can develop in confidence and self esteem when their views are listened to and valued. It also promotes a sense of active citizenship and social inclusion if they have a say in the services they receive. Also through participation, it is more likely that services will be tailored to the need of individuals and communities if those in receipt of services have some input into the planning, commissioning and evaluation processes.

Although there is an increasing amount of rhetoric regarding the need for more participation, it is a challenge to move it from ad hoc activities to embedded practice in mainstream activity. This is particularly pertinent as different organisations with different cultures and sometimes different ways of working come together to form the new Children's Trusts.



## Range of possible approaches

For the purposes of this framework document, participation is seen as incorporating a range of techniques and approaches. Several writers, such as Roger Hart, Sherry Arnstein and Harry Shier have proposed a “ladder of participation”. The ladder suggests an incremental approach ranging from very limited involvement at one end of the ladder to a position whereby children are initiating and sharing decisions with adults at the higher end of the range. Examples are included in Appendix One.

A ladder of participation gives a sense of progression so that the level of engagement is increased. An example of this is in the youth service where young people might start attending a youth club but then become more engaged over time so that they get to the position of youth leader at the youth club.

In Kent, there are some service areas where people are increasingly being empowered to be active partners and even co-producers of the service but there are other areas where this level of participation might not be appropriate. There is a case for adopting a range of approaches. There are some circumstances where the provision of information or consultation might be the most appropriate approach, for example when seeking quantitative information through a survey might be the preferred option.

More than one approach may be needed in particular circumstances and a one size fits all approach is not appropriate. Children are not a homogenous group and there is no single way to ascertain

their views. Children with special needs or younger children or children with “quiet voices” might need different methods of participation.

When deciding which participation techniques or activities to use, consideration should be given to:

- the purpose of the participation exercise
- the age and ability of the children and young people involved
- the needs of the children and young people
- the topic under consideration
- the number and characteristics of the children involved
- the resources available
- the skills of the workers



## Identify emerging practice

Given that there are a range of approaches and methodologies, we need to ensure that there are opportunities to learn from what works well and what doesn't work. This includes being open to new ideas and sharing views within Kent but also learning from best practice from outside the county and across the public, private and voluntary sectors.

There are examples where participation works well in the county - such as in Connexions, Children's Fund, SureStart, the Kent Youth Service and some "Student Voice" initiatives within schools. The experience of these services needs to be drawn upon to help develop a participation culture within the new Children's Trust arrangements.

## Sharing of knowledge and understanding

There has been a rapid growth in toolkits and guidance documents on developing a culture of participation. Some of these are national and some local. Examples include:

- "Hear by Right: Standards for the active involvement of children and young people". National Youth Agency (2004).
- "Building a Culture of Participation" DfES.
- "The participation of children and young people in developing social care". The Social Care Institute for Excellence.
- "Having a say in health: guidelines for involving young patients in health services development". University of York, Social Policy Research Unit.
- KCC Children's Centre Participation Toolkit.
- Kent Children's Fund documents e.g. Kent Participation Jigsaw, Framework for Children's Participation.



## Agreed standards

To ensure that the participation (including consultation) is a positive, meaningful and useful experience for those involved, it needs to be done to required standards. These might differ according to the type of participation activity being undertaken. However there are some core principles that can be adopted:

Children and young people's best interests need to be paramount and protected:

- Children's participation must benefit children and young people.
- Activity should be developed which leads to positive outcomes for children and young people and so is not tokenistic.

Children and young people need to be informed about the activity that they are participating in and how the information is going to be used:

- Care needs to be taken to present this information in a form that they will understand.
- Children and young people should have a choice regarding how they participate – where possible.

Children's consent should be sought on an ongoing basis:

- Consent should be done in a way that acknowledges the unequal power dynamic between adult and child.

- The ability of the child to give consent needs to be considered and parent or carer consent should also be sought where children are for example, very young.

Equity and children and young people's equal opportunity to participate needs to be considered throughout.

- It is important to consider which children and young people are being included and excluded in the process and how to engage with children and young people who do not normally join in. This may involve taking the time to build trusting relationships with children and young people ensuring that they are offered a range of ways of participating. Without this, participation may perpetuate or increase isolation and the exclusion of certain groups.

Children and young people should be given feedback from their participation and be informed of what decisions they have influenced or not influenced. Again at the outset there needs to be clear parameters about the participation and what the "boundaries" are.

## Communication

Who is doing what in terms of consultation and participation? How is information shared with others afterwards?

Although there is participation and consultation activity taking place in Kent this is generally commissioned by individual services. As we move towards more integrated partnership working arrangements, there is a case for more cross boundary liaison on participation through the county and local Children's Trusts. This could maximise the benefits of the participation activity and help to avoid duplication so that individual children and young people are not asked the same questions by different agencies.

Without wanting to be prescriptive, there could be benefits to mapping information about what is taking place, setting out who is involved and what issues children and young people are being engaged to consider. An additional benefit of mapping is to identify areas where children and young people haven't had the opportunity to be involved. For the mapping to succeed it would require a commitment from all agencies to ensure the information is provided and kept up to date.

Another consideration is how best to share and make use of the information that comes out of the participation or consultation. This could be through a newsletter, a website, seminar or network.

## Training and developing competencies

Many of the skills needed in participation – such as listening and communication are skills that are found in many childcare services. However, there are additional techniques and strategies required to ensure those conducting the participation are sufficiently skilled and confident so that it is a productive experience for all involved. This is especially so where the children or young people have special or additional needs.

Again the sharing of expertise and knowledge across the sector can assist in developing a broad skill base across the agencies. This can be facilitated by the joint commissioning of training on a range of participation and consultation methods and techniques.



## **How is information from participation used to improve outcomes, planning and performance monitoring?**

Although there is participation and consultation activity taking place in Kent, it is challenging to identify:

- How it impacts on the outcomes for children and young people (what difference has it made?); and
- How children and young people are contributing to the evaluation and performance monitoring of services.

The Kent Children and Young People's Plan and associated guides provide an example of how children and young people can contribute to the planning process. The opportunity needs to be taken to build on this so that children and young people routinely contribute to the planning and development of services.

## **From Debate to Action!**

### **Proposal for Local Pathfinder Trusts to trial participation activity**

The introduction of the Pathfinder Trusts is a further opportunity to develop and review new approaches to participation.

This could include:

1. Setting up a shadow arrangement of young people age 11 to 19 for a local partnership trust
2. Setting up action groups to consider different themes or issues, such as bullying or healthy lives. The action groups could include a spread of ages including younger children
3. Asking children and young people how they would like to be involved and consulted on issues being considered by the local trusts.

It is proposed that the Children's Fund (Participate by Right), Connexions and the Children, Families and Education Directorate should provide initial support for the pathfinder areas to set up participation arrangements. This would include:

- 1 To test and trial local participation arrangements
- 2 Learning from what works well to embed arrangements
- 3 Evaluate the success or otherwise of the participation.

## The Kent Children's Trust agreed that:-

1. The Children's Trust accept the Framework and core standards.
2. The local Pathfinder Trusts develop approaches to participation that are consistent with this Framework.
3. Local Trusts and Pathfinder Trusts trial approaches and share emerging good practice.
4. The local/Pathfinder Trusts ask children and young people their views on how they want to be involved and participate.
5. When seeking to engage children and young people, those who are perceived as "hard to reach" or who are seldom heard should also be involved.
6. An annual programme of participation is developed to identify gaps and "themes" that need to be explored further – e.g. issues highlighted through the pupil survey.
7. A mechanism is established to communicate what participation/consultation activity is taking place and what the outcomes are. This should link to a Children's Trust Communication Strategy.
8. Trust members should revisit the participation strategies and practices in their services and projects to ensure they conform to the principles and standards contained in this Framework document.



# Appendix One

One approach is that put forward by Roger Hart who refers to different degrees of involvement. He suggests there are eight degrees of involvement on a "ladder of participation" (from least to greatest)

## Non- Participation

1. Manipulation
2. Decoration
3. Tokenism

## Participation

4. Assigned but informed
5. Consulted and informed
6. Adult initiated, shared decisions with children
7. Child-initiated and directed
8. Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults

Harry Shier provides a useful framework for participation that identifies 5 levels of participation - the higher the level, the greater the engagement with the child and the greater the level of power and control for the project is devolved to the child. According to Shier's scale level 3 represents the minimum participation requirements for children as laid out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Shier's 5 levels are categorised as follows;

1. Children are listened to
2. Children are encouraged to share their views and experiences - this recognises that not all children are able to articulate their views readily, and that adults need to think of mechanisms to engaging with children to achieve this
3. Children's views are taken into account (NB this is the minimum threshold for Article 12 of the UNCRC)
4. Children are involved at the point of decision making. Consideration needs to be given as to how children's views can be included in management meetings and other usual adult forums where key decisions are taken.
5. Children are given power and responsibility. This reflects on the relationship between adults and children and necessarily involves adults needing to change their activities to enable participation to be effective.

## Appendix Two

List of some of the consultation and participation activities with children and young people in Kent.

- SureStart Children's Centre integral part of service
- Kent Children's Fund – integral part of projects and services
- Connexions Kent & Medway – integral part of service
- NFER Children and Young People of Kent Survey 2006-07
- Kent Youth County Council
- Student Voice activities in schools
- Youth Participation Forums
- Youth Participation Officer with Young Offender Service
- 16+ Participation Officer and events
- Looked After Children - Viewpoint, Upfront, Child care reviews
- Family Group Conferencing
- Children with disability – service development partnership
- Schools Councils
- Early Years parent's surveys
- Parent's networks attached to Children's Centres
- Attendance and Behaviour Service – Youth Action Groups and Panels involved in recruitment
- Parents Consortium
- Partnership with Parents
- Young Carers Consultation
- Extended Schools parental support involvement strategy
- Local participation projects to inform District/City Councils

The above list does not cover every consultation/participation activity.



## Glossary of Terms

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| Participation    | To take part in. But in this context, participation is about: asking children and young people what works, what doesn't and what could work better, and involving them on an ongoing basis, in the design, delivery and evaluation of services.  |
| Citizenship      | Member of a state. In this context, citizenship is about: being actively involved in contributing to the wider community, both nationally and internationally, and through that, acquiring skills to enable people to participate in society at all levels.  |
| Social Inclusion | Social inclusion is about reducing inequalities between the least advantaged groups, communities and the rest of society, by closing the opportunity gap and ensuring that support reaches those who need it most. Social inclusion is action to change the circumstances and habits that lead to (or have led to) social exclusion. |
| Commissioning    | The arrangements by which those who hold resources for children's services decide how to use them in order to improve outcomes for children, young people and families.  |
| Consultation     | To seek people's views or advice before making a decision.   |
| Evaluation       | To find or judge the value of something  |
| Ad Hoc           | For a particular occasion only   |
| Loco Parentis    | In the place of parents  |
| Prescriptive     | Set out the rules or order for something   |
| Initiated        | To originate or begin something  |

## Relevant Documents/ Publications/Weblinks

"Children's Participation. The Theory and Practice of Involving Young Citizens in Community Development and Environmental Care" by Roger Hart (Earthscan Publications)

"Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship, Innocenti Essays No 4" by Roger Hart (Florence: UNICEF)

"Pathways to Participation: Openings, Opportunities and Obligations: A New Model for Enhancing Children's Decision Making, in line with Article 12.1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child" by Harry Shier (Children and Society - Volume 15 (2) Pages 107-117)

"A Ladder of Participation" by Sherry Arnstein (Journal of the American Institute of Planners, 35 July Pages 216-224) (1969)

"Youth Matters" Youth Green Paper (July 2005)

"Youth Matters: Next Steps" (March 2006)

"National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services" (2004)

"The Participation of Children and Young People in Developing Social Care" – Wright, Turner, Clay and Mills

"Strong and Prosperous Communities" – Local Government White Paper (2006)

Working Together: Giving Children and Young People a Say – DfES Statutory Guidance (April 2004) relating to Section 176 of the Education Act 2002

"Building a culture of Participation" DfES. [www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/participation](http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/participation)

"Hear by Right: Standards for the Active Involvement of children and young people." National Youth Agency (2004) [www.nya.org.uk/hearbyright](http://www.nya.org.uk/hearbyright)

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)

Kent County Council Children's Centre Participation Toolkit

Kent Children's Fund documents:

- Evaluation of Children's Participation in the Kent Children's Fund by J Tonkin
- The Kent Participation Framework
- Kent Participation Jigsaw

'Participation with Young People - Kent' Community of Practice [www.communities.idea.gov.uk](http://www.communities.idea.gov.uk)

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