



Strategy for Participation and Engagement of Children and Young People





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Title	Strategy for Participation and Engagement of Children and Young People
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Purpose	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To set out Key Strategies that CEF and the CYPSP will take to extend the range of Participation and Engagement Activities to more children and young people than in the past 2. To set how CEF and the CYPSP propose to include young people in helping to shape and design services delivered to them

Introduction

The Children, Education and Families Directorate and the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership have a vision to improve the quality of the services they provide for children and families and to ensure that they meet needs and are fit for purpose. Underpinning this vision is the commitment from the Council and its strategic partners that all key strategies and actions will be based on comprehensive, continuous and consistent feedback and involvement of children, young people and their families in reviewing services quality and in shaping service design.

Ensuring the inclusion of the views and needs of Children, young people, parents and carers is the foundation of much of the *Making a Positive Contribution* key outcomes in *Every Child Matters*. In addition Article 12 of *The UN Convention of Rights of the Child* places duties and responsibilities on local government to promote and safeguard the right of children and young people to express their views on all matters that affect their lives.

This strategy sets out how the Council and its partner agencies will meet their commitment to engaging with children, young people and their families and to ensuring that their views and contributions lie at the heart of our decision making.



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Strategic Aims

The intention behind this strategic plan is to focus on

- Ensuring that all children, young people and families in Thurrock have a range of effective mechanisms which allow them to regularly feedback their views about the quality and quantity of services provided for them by agencies within the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership
- Ensuring that all children, young people and families in Thurrock have a range of effective mechanisms which allow them to regularly contribute to and influence the design and delivery of services provided for them by agencies within the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership

Purpose

This strategy sets out:

- Our intended outcomes for improving the range and effectiveness of our participation and engagement strategies
- The actions that the Council's Children, Education and Families Directorate will take, in conjunction with its strategic partners, to develop and implement systems and processes that will ensure that the intended outcomes are met
- The annual cycle of Participation and Engagement events and activities that will be delivered throughout the year by the Council's CEF Directorate and its strategic partners
- The systems and processes that the Council and its partners will develop and implement to ensure that the voice of children, young people and their families is used to influence strategic and operational decisions
- The systems and processes that the Council and its partners will develop and implement to ensure regular good quality feedback to children, young people and their families on how their voice and views have influenced and driven decisions and actions we take
- Ensures that the '*Principles of Community Engagement and Involvement*'¹ underpin all consultations and engagement activities undertaken on behalf of CEF and the Partnership (CYPSP).

¹ 'Principles of Community Involvement' are attached as Appendix 1



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Context

The Community Involvement Board's (CIB) *Principles of Community Engagement and Involvement* core values were agreed in September 2006. These principles serve to guarantee the effective planning, engagement, evaluation and feedback of a project. A full explanation of the principles can be accessed in appendix 1.

The stages of planning community engagement in the CIB's *Principles of Community Engagement and Involvement* also underpin this strategy for work with children and young people. They are as follows:

- Planning
- Engagement
- Evaluation and Feedback

Five Levels of Community Engagement, known as the spectrum of engagement²

Level	What's involved
1. Information	We tell people about our plans and services and gather information about attitudes, opinions and preferences.
2. Consultation	We ask people for their views on specific policies or proposals
3. Deliberation	We discuss what the issues and priorities are and involve people at various stages
4. Collaboration	We work together to improve and design new services
5. Partnership	We maintain an equal and effective working relationship

This strategy will overlap with the *CEF Communications Strategy* which adheres to the Corporate Communications Strategy.

² David Wilcox – The guide to effective participation. (1994)



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Key Principles

The following good practice principles will be applied

- **Well Planned and Co-ordinated**
 - Explaining the purpose behind any participation and engagement activity
 - Planning the approach to include details on keeping children and young people up to date once they become involved
 - Ensuring the participation and engagement activity is needed.
 - Ensuring that the information sought is not already available to avoid unnecessary duplication
 - Making joint approaches and activities from partner agencies wherever possible
- **Well Timed**
 - Giving participants sufficient time to prepare
 - Giving participants sufficient time to think and to respond
 - Phasing and planning to avoid overload at any point of the year
- **Openness and Honesty**
 - Making sure participants know why they are being asked to engage and become involved
 - Making sure participants know how their engagement can influence and determine decisions and/or choices to be made
 - Explaining why engagement and participation responses may have had a limited effect if necessary
- **Inclusive**
 - Involving all of Thurrock's children, young people and families, by addressing any possible barriers of age, gender, ethnicity, geographical location, disability or individual circumstances
 - Making it clear who can and who cannot participate and why
 - Looking into any barriers to participation to try and improve access in future
- **Clearly Communicated**
 - Making the information, discussion topics and any questions clear and understandable
 - Asking young people themselves for advice and guidance on the best ways to communicate
 - Making sure that children and young people know of the activity is being monitored
 - Using the best methods to contact and involve children and young people



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- **Providing Feedback**
 - Letting participants know how they have helped by letting them know what has happened
 - Making sure information on what has happened is easy to access and understand
 - Asking young people themselves for advice and guidance on the best ways to provide feedback
- **Using the Feedback Openly and Proactively**
 - We will let participants know of any decisions made from their engagement and give them the opportunity to say what they think and/or ask questions
 - We will look at how successful our approach has been and investigate and address the reasons where the approach has not been successful
 - When the response from participants is good, we will identify the reasons and seek to repeat these in later work
 - We will work together to share approaches, good practice and the lessons learnt to inform other organisations and help them to improve participation and engagement with young people

Intended Outcomes of this Strategy by 2010

1. The quality of our participation and engagement activity will be at least good
2. The breadth and range of our participation and engagement activity will be at least good
3. Children and young people will have consistent and appropriate opportunities to influence the design of services to be delivered
4. Service providers will make consistent and effective use of children and young people's contributions in shaping service design and delivery
5. The numbers of children and young people involved in participation and engagement activity will be significantly increased
6. Representatives of specific groups within our community will have consistent and appropriate opportunities to participate and be engaged in providing feedback and shaping service design and delivery
7. Young people are commissioned to deliver participation and engagement activities to other children and young people on behalf of the Partnership



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2010 Targets and Interim Milestones

1. More than 80%³ of children and young people surveyed judge the quality of our participation and engagement activity as good or better by 2010
 - July 2007 - Baseline of children and young people's views and opinions about participation and engagement in place
 - July 2008 – 70% of children and young people surveyed judge quality as good or better
 - July 2008 – 95% of children and young people surveyed judge quality as satisfactory or better
2. More than 80% of children and young people surveyed judge the breadth and range of our participation and engagement activity as good or better by 2010
 - July 2007 - Baseline of children and young people's views and opinions about participation and engagement in place
 - July 2008 – 70% of children and young people surveyed judge breadth as good or better
 - July 2008 – 95% of children and young people surveyed judge breadth as satisfactory or better
3. More than 80% of children and young people surveyed judge their opportunities to influence service design and delivery as good or better by 2010
 - July 2007 - Baseline of children and young people's views and opinions about participation and engagement in place
 - July 2008 – 60% of children and young people surveyed judge influence on service design as good or better
 - July 2009 – 70% of children and young people surveyed judge influence on service design as good or better
4. External Inspection judgement (2010 APA) and internal review judgement (Youth Cabinet review) both judge use of young people's views and contributions as outstanding
 - July 2007 – Summary position statement on participation and engagement and on use of young people's contributions agreed from Joint Area Review feedback and review of Youth Cabinet views in 2007
 - May 2008 – APA (or equivalent) considers participation and engagement work and use of young people's contributions as significantly improved
 - May 2009 – APA (or equivalent) considers participation and engagement work and use of young people's contributions as at least good

³ 80% target figure to be adjusted accordingly after establishing baseline in July 07



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5. The numbers of young people involved in participation and activity increases by an average of 10% per year, from a baseline of the number of young people participating in consultation in 2006
 - July 2007 – Baseline level confirmed and new targets and milestones set
 - May 2008 – Numbers engaged at least 10% above 2007 baseline
 - May 2009 – Numbers engaged at least 20% above 2007 baseline
6. Partnership conducts formal engagement activities at least twice yearly with the following groups
 - Children and young people from Black and Minority Ethnic Groups
 - Children and young people from the 4 geographical cluster areas across the Borough
 - Children and young people from the Traveller community
 - Children and young people who are Looked After
 - Children and young people who have recently left care
 - Children and young people who have Special Educational Needs
 - Children and young people who are deaf / hearing impaired
 - Children and young people who are visually impaired
 - Children and young people who are Young Carers
7. At least 20% of all face to face participation and engagement activity will be carried out by young people themselves
 - September 2007 – One group of 6 young “Consultation Co-ordinators” appointed and delivering at least 4 face to face events each
 - September 2008 – Two groups of 6 young “Consultation Co-ordinators” appointed and delivering at least 4 face to face events each and at least 1 large scale event jointly
 - September 2009 – Four groups of 6 young “Consultation Co-ordinators” appointed working in each school cluster and delivering at least 4 face to face events each and 3 large scale annual events jointly



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Strategic Objectives

There will be six key strategic objectives in developing and implementing our approach to participation and engagement

1. Improve the planning and co-ordination of participation and consultation activities across the Borough
2. Extend the range of processes for eliciting the views of children, young people and families on service quality, service impact and on the quality of their life in Thurrock
3. Implement processes for using the views and feedback from children, young people and families in shaping the design and content of the services delivered by single and multi-agency groups
4. Develop and implement procedures to improve the involvement of children aged 5 to 13 in participation and engagement activities
5. Develop and implement procedures to improve service provider engagement with specific groups, including those who are vulnerable and/or at risk
6. Create opportunities for young people to lead, manage and deliver participation and engagement activities on behalf of single agencies and the Partnership

What CEF and Its Partner Agencies Will Do

Strategic Objective 1

Improve the planning and co-ordination of participation and consultation activities across the Borough

KEY STRATEGIES WILL BE

1. Set up Steering Groups within CYPSP and the Youth Cabinet to oversee and review participation and engagement activities
2. Establish system for collating and approving all intended participation and engagement activities
3. Publish an annual Participation and Engagement Forward Plan
4. Commission young people themselves to support and contribute to the planning, co-ordination and communication of Participation and Engagement opportunities for children and young people



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Strategic Objective 2

Extend the range of processes for eliciting the views of children, young people and families on service quality, service impact and on the quality of their life in Thurrock

KEY STRATEGIES WILL BE

1. Explore and harness the power and potential of new technology to deliver participation and engagement activities, including the Internet, blogging and text messaging
2. Develop a range of participation and engagement activity that allows us to use written, spoken and visual forms of communication and feedback
3. Implement a series of activities to take senior managers within the Partnership out to the local communities within the borough and to local schools to engage with children and young people
4. **Develop and implement at least one opportunity for young people to participate in a “meaningful” voting activity every year, where some aspect of decision-making or service delivery is presented to them as an either / or option and where the majority vote will determine the decision and action to be taken within the Children’s Trust**

Strategic Objective 3

Implement processes for using the views and feedback from children, young people and families in shaping the design and content of the services delivered by single and multi-agency groups

KEY STRATEGIES WILL BE

1. Extend the role of the Youth Cabinet to include feedback which influences service design and delivery
2. Require single and multi-agency plans within the Partnership’s remit to identify and evidence how children and young people’s views have influenced the plan
3. Require single and multi-agency plans within the Partnership’s remit to identify and evidence how children and young people’s will have ongoing and consistent opportunities to influence service design and delivery within the plan concerned



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Strategic Objective 4

Develop and implement procedures to improve the involvement of children aged 5 to 13 in participation and engagement activities

KEY STRATEGIES WILL BE

1. Extend the cycle of consultation events to include twice-yearly engagement activities for Primary Schools
2. Locate a series of CEF Executive meetings in volunteer Primary Schools to include preliminary agenda item for consultation and dialogue with children from the school/School Council
3. Target Primary schools along with secondaries wherever relevant for participation and engagement activities

Strategic Objective 5

Develop and implement procedures to improve service provider engagement with specific groups, including those who are vulnerable and/or at risk

KEY STRATEGIES WILL BE

1. Set up a series of "Spotlight On" sessions focusing on twice yearly face to face dialogue and engagement of the following specific groups
 - Children and young people from BME Community
 - Deaf and hearing impaired young people
 - Blind and visually impaired young people
 - Children and Young People with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities
2. "Piggy back" spotlight consultation activities onto existing participation and engagement activities with the following specific groups
 - Young Carers
 - Teenage Parents



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- Traveller Community
- 3. Establish a Children in Care Council

Strategic Objective 6

Create opportunities for young people to lead, manage and deliver participation and engagement activities on behalf of single agencies and the Partnership

KEY STRATEGIES WILL BE

1. Commission young people to set up, deliver and report on face to face participation and engagement activities on behalf of the Council and its partners
2. Establishing a group of young people who will be employed to act as advisors and ambassadors for participation and engagement activities

Monitoring and Evaluation

The implementation and impact of this strategy will be monitored and evaluated on an ongoing basis by relevant agencies, co-ordinated and collated by the CYPSP Participation and Engagement Steering Group. The views of children and young people themselves will form an integral part of the evidence base on which evaluations of this strategy's impact will be made.

Quality Assurance in CEF will draft performance reports on the implementation of this strategy and progress towards achieving milestones and targets. These will be reported to the CYPSP Executive, to CEF Executive, to the Community Involvement Board and to the Youth Cabinet.

At the initial stage of developing this strategy and at the subsequent stages of implementation it will be subject to ongoing monitoring and evaluation against the Hear By Right standards and against Investors in Children

A separate and detailed monitoring and evaluation framework for this strategy has been developed.

Review of this Strategy



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Although this strategy will be subject to ongoing review, it will be formally reviewed and revised by the CYPSP in May 2010.

Appendix 1 – Principles of Community Involvement

PLANNING

1. Clear and Agreed Purposes

'We will be clear about why there is a need to engage with our community'

The community – or sections of the community – should be engaged with appropriately. For this to happen, the outcomes to be achieved from engaging with the community must be agreed. Clear and valid reasons for involving sections of the community in work being carried out must be considered prior to involvement taking place. This is essential if the involvement that takes place is to be meaningful both to those carrying out the exercise and those being consulted with – therefore allowing true engagement to occur.

2. Co-ordinated Approach

'We will ensure that a co-ordinated approach is taken to engaging with our community'

It is essential that there is a partnership approach taken to engaging with and involving the community. Part of planning to engage should be to check whether other partners – both internal and external to the organisation planning the work – are carrying out consultation and/or engagement exercises with similar outcomes. A joined-up approach ensures that the community are not overloaded. It is also the most efficient way to engage and increases the likelihood of participation.

3. Timing

'We will ensure that where possible, engagement with our community is timely in accordance with their requirements'

Accurate and timely information is crucial for effective and inclusive engagement. It also indicates a well-planned and thought out approach. Length of time should be considered, as should the best times to reach the target audience within the community. Consideration must also be given to whether the community is already being, has been, or will be engaged with by other agencies at a similar time. It is important that the points raised under theme 2 are adhered to.

4. Methodology – 'Fit for Purpose'



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‘Unless circumstances dictate that engagement should take place via specified methodology, methods taken to engage with our community should take account of different needs’

It is important that the right approach is considered – For example, one size does not fit all. To do this successfully, the target audience needs to be correctly identified and an understanding of how best to engage and involve that particular audience needs to be gained – either via previous research or through contacting members of a community or groups that represent a community. The methods used to engage also need to produce the desired outcomes and this must be considered when planning how to engage. For the reasons described, a variety of methods should be considered – such as talking/discussing with small groups where literacy is an issue.

5. Justify Target Audience

‘We will justify and communicate why specific audiences have been targeted for engagement’

If a particular section(s) of the community has been targeted, then reasons for this should be explained.

6. Involve

‘We will involve and seek advice from our community when planning to engage with them’

Even at the planning stage, unless there is a statutory obligation to engage and/or consult in a certain way, the community should be involved in an advisory capacity.

ENGAGEMENT

1. Transparency – being ‘Open and Honest’

‘We will be open and honest when engaging with our community and ensure that the processes we use are transparent’

When we engage with the community, there should be transparency around the reasons for engagement and what will happen with information gained as a result of engagement. It should be clear why participants are being consulted/engaged, and that the reasons given are genuine. Individuals carrying out engagement activity should be open and honest about what can and cannot be achieved – including any constraints and boundaries – with reasons for this.

2. Inclusive

‘We will aim to be inclusive by enabling all groups within our community to participate and/or their views to be represented when engaging on issues relevant to them’

Attempts must be made to ensure that groups of people whose interests are affected by the issues that the engagement will address are well represented – particularly sections of the communities that seldom participate. This will mean using a



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methodology that is flexible enough to be inclusive and understanding how people wish to participate. Being inclusive also means enabling people to be involved if they wish to be involved and removing any barriers to that involvement. This may be referred to as 'Equality of Access'. With reference to 'Equality of Access', the necessary support should be provided to enable participation.

3. Inform and Communicate Effectively

'We will ensure that our community are given information about why they are being engaged with and that the information supplied is accessible by all'

Members of the community need to understand what they are being engaged about. The material used needs to be accessible, clear, understandable, and relevant. It also needs to be presented in the correct format. Again, one size does not fit all, and a variety of ways of communicating may need to be used. In the planning stage, community advice should be sought early on, and when engaging, measures should be put in place to track how effective communication methods are employed.

EVALUATION AND FEEDBACK

1. Providing Feedback

'We will provide our community with regular feedback when engaging with them'

Results of engagement should be readily accessible to those who wish to view it – especially those people affected by the results of the consultation and/or other activity where the community have been involved. It is important that the community are aware of how their input has and will be used and what it will affect. Options considered and the decisions and actions that have been agreed as a result of the consultation/engagement process should be effectively communicated. Information communicated should follow the same principle as 'Inform and Communicate Effectively' – principle 3 under the 'Engaging' stage.

2. Right to Challenge

'Our community will be given the opportunity to comment and/or complain about the engagement process and decisions made as a result of information received through the engagement process'

Members of the community should be given the right to challenge the results of any consultation and/or engagement exercise and the process used – including interpretations made as a result of engagement. They should also be given the right to challenge decisions made as a result of information gained. This is part of 'open and honest' engagement and can be subject to scrutiny. Through the engagement process, participants must be made aware as to what they can and cannot alter – this is part of establishing constraints and boundaries.



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3. Measuring Success

'We will evaluate the engagement process against agreed outcomes and make the results of the evaluation available to our community'

Where engagement has taken place, monitoring should take place to examine whether outcomes have been met. The process used should also be assessed against the principles outlined within this document. Just as the community should be involved from the outset, they should also be given the opportunity to comment and advise on the findings of any engagement evaluation.

4. Lessons Learnt

'We will ensure that any lessons learned from engagement carried out are used to develop better processes and are used to inform future engagement with our community'

It is important that something happens to 'learning points' gained as a result of monitoring and evaluation. Apart from gaining an understanding as to why part(s) of the engagement process have not worked or could have worked better – for example, maybe the methodology was not the most appropriate, or participation was not as good as expected, learning points should be factored back in to the planning process to avoid the same thing happening again. In this instance, learning should help to develop Shaping Thurrock's Community Engagement Toolkit.

5. Best Practice

'We will recognise best practice and ensure that it is used to inform future engagement with our community'

Just as lessons learned should be observed, engagement that has worked well should not be taken for granted. Engagement that has worked well should be shared between partners and should also be used to develop future engagement exercises by informing the planning stage. Reasons where community involvement has not led to the expected outcomes should also be shared.