

Monmouthshire Children's Services

Participation Strategy for Children and Young People

Involvement in decisions that affect their lives is a fundamental right for all children and young people. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states that every child has the right to express their views on matters that affect them and for their views to be given due weight in accordance with their age, understanding and maturity.

Monmouthshire County Council is committed to working towards a county that works for everyone and giving children the best possible start in life and lifelong well-being. In line with this, Children's Services is working to ensure that all its work, from individual work with children and young people, to reviews of the services it provides and development of new services, is appropriately informed by the views of children and young people.

This strategy has been written to ensure that everyone who works in Children's Services has a common understanding of, and is confident in their approach to, children and young people's participation and that our work is rights-based, inclusive, respectful and safe.

This strategy takes account of other work across the service including Monmouthshire's Corporate Parenting Strategy 2018 -2021, the Risk Assessment Framework and Collaborative Communication. All of these are child-focussed and expect practitioners to work collaboratively and respectfully with children and young people, and from the principle of 'what matters' to them.

Each team across Children's Services will have unique pressures and different priorities and therefore the specifics of how this strategy applies across the service will differ depending on the nature of the work being undertaken. Each team will therefore need to consider how to implement the strategy and formulate their own action plan for practice within the team. There are templates included below to support this.

What we are hoping to achieve

Monmouthshire Children's Services aims to:

- Place the child/young person at the centre of everything we do
- Learn from children and young people about what matters to them, their thoughts, hopes, needs and views about their lives, the services they receive and the barriers they experience
- Use this information to make the best decisions we can for and with children and young people, and strive to continuously improve what we do and how we work.

This strategy sets out how Children's Services will embed its commitment to Children's Rights and participation and work to ensure that children and young people have the opportunity to have their voices heard and are involved in decisions that affect them. This includes the design, development and commissioning of services, and planning, delivering and reviewing the services which children and young people receive.

What is Participation?

Participation is about involving children and young people in making decisions, planning and reviewing any action that might affect them. Participation is not an event; it is a process of listening to children and young people and encouraging them to contribute their views and ideas about what should happen. This might be in relation to a specific issue, a service they receive or about the development of new services. Then it is about acting on their contributions in a meaningful way. Participation does not mean that children and young people will necessarily get everything they ask for. However, it does mean that they should be able to see how their views have been taken into account. The outcome of any decision-making process will always be a balance between the wishes and feelings of all those involved; risks, needs, what is possible and ultimately the best interests of the child or young person.

Children's Services makes decisions that affect children and young people all the time. Not only decisions about individual children and young people, but also the services we develop and the policies and procedures we write that inform how we work. To become truly rights-based we need to find ways of actively involving seeking the views and involvement of wider groups of children and young people and use what we find out to shape what we do and how we do it, so that we better meet their needs.

Monmouthshire County Council, Children's Services, your team and you as a practitioner should be able to document, plan and evidence how you involve children and young people in decisions that affect them, in the services they receive and in evaluation of services and then how you intend to achieve the outcomes identified.

Participation Drivers: Legislation and Policy

The Welsh Government is committed to ensuring that the UNCRC becomes a reality in Wales and this is at the heart of Welsh Government legislation including:

- The Children Act 2004¹ which states that when a local authority is making a decision relating to a child, it should as far as is reasonably practicable and consistent with the child's welfare: ascertain and give due consideration to the child's wishes and feelings in any decisions being taken.
- The Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011² which places a duty on Welsh Ministers to have 'due regard' to children's rights when making decisions.
- The Children and Families' (Wales) Measure 2010³ which places a statutory duty on Local Authorities to promote and facilitate participation by children and young people in decisions of the Local Authority that affect them.
- The Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014⁴ places a duty on Local Authorities to work in partnership with the person's wishes and feelings as far as is reasonable, practicable and in-line with the person's welfare and must have regard to children, young people and families participating as fully as possible in decisions that affect them and having the information and support to do this.
- The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015⁵ which outlines key ways of working, in order to achieve the 'well-being goals'. The participation of children and young people is at the heart of this legislation including involvement in identifying problems before they arise, hearing the views of the most vulnerable and involvement in developing and improving services.

¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/31/contents>

² <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/mwa/2011/2/contents>

³ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/mwa/2010/1/contents>

⁴ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2014/4/contents>

⁵ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2015/2/contents/enacted>

- The Social Care Code of Practice which demands workers respect the views and wishes and promote the rights and interests of individuals and carers, and promote the well-being, voice and control of individuals and carers.

Benefits of Participation

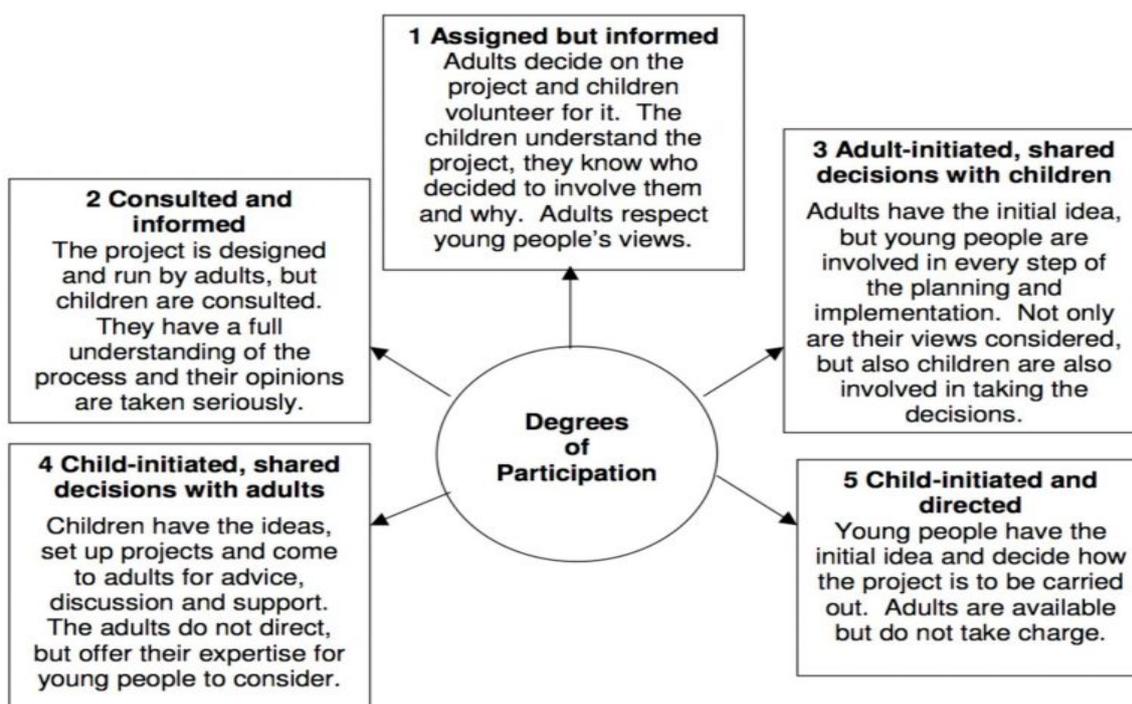
Participation is not just a legal right for children, young people and their families; it is also a way of improving how we work and the services that people receive. It provides us with new information and a wider perspective of the services we provide and enables us to adapt and change what we do and how we do it to better meet people's needs. Involvement gives children, young people and families ownership of the services they use, this makes the work we are doing together more likely to be successful. Working collaboratively and involving children, young people and families means that the people we are working with feel valued, respected and more in control of what is happening.

	Benefits to children and young people	Benefits to Children's Services and your practice
Better decisions	Children and young people feel taken seriously, valued, listened to and respected. They have the opportunity to share their views and have a real say in shaping their own lives	It can improve our understanding of the lives of the children and young people we work with
Better services	Children and young people can hold the Local Authority to account in their decision-making and help improve services.	It can help us improve existing services including your practice but showing you the things that are working and the things that don't work so well for children and young people
Better use of resources	Children and young people have an investment in the decisions that are being made.	It can help us develop new services that are more relevant and can meet the changing needs of children and young people
Better practice	Children and young people can build on existing skills and knowledge, develop new skills and have the positive things they achieve recognised and shared.	Where children and young people feel taken seriously, valued, listened to and respected you will be more able to build trusting relationships and improve the way you work.
Stronger communities	It can help empower children and young people and	Where children and young people feel taken seriously, valued,

	increase their self-esteem and self-confidence. Children and young people are seen and valued as equal citizens within their wider communities.	listened to and respected they are more likely to feel they belong which will promote stronger, more connected communities
--	---	--

Types of Participation

Having participation as a common principle across Children’s Services does not mean that every engagement with a child, young person or family should be undertaken in the same way. Tresedar’s (1997)⁶ model of participation recognises the fact that different approaches will be needed for different situations, more detail about this model is contained in Appendix 1.



The different degrees are not better or ‘more participatory’ than any other. What you do needs to be appropriate for the situation including the needs and wishes of the individual child or young person. However all forms of participation require a sharing

⁶ From: Empowering children & young people training manual: promoting involvement in decision making (Save the Children). Phil Treseder, 1997

of power between those that hold more in whatever the situation is (in Children's Services this is usually social workers, courts, other professionals and adults) and those that have less (usually children, young people, families).

When thinking about how you are going to involve children and young people in the decisions being made you will need to think about what level of participation is the most appropriate. A Child Looked After Review, for example, is necessarily an adult led process, children should be consulted and informed. A piece of direct work with a child or young person may be adult-initiated, shared decisions.

Some Things to Think About?

1. Who has the most power or influence in relation to the decision being taken?
How will you communicate the views and wishes of the child/young person in a way that means they will be valued, respected and listened to?
2. Does the child/young person have the information they need to make an informed decision about whether they want to be part of the decision, do they understand what is being asked of them?
3. Does the child/young person understand what is happening, do they know what decisions are being made, how their involvement will make a difference and what will happen next? Have you been clear about the degree to which their views can affect the outcome?
4. Are you offering different options and are these realistic, are the choices being offered meaningful and honest?
5. Does the child or young person have support from a trusted, independent person, do they need an advocate? Is any other support needed?
6. Is there an appeals or complaints process if anything goes wrong. Is it accessible and does the child/young person understand how to access it?
7. How do you know? How are you checking that their involvement is meaningful and not tokenistic?

National Participation Standards

For participation to be meaningful the adults involved need to have a genuine interest and belief in the abilities and skills of children and young people. Participation cannot be about ticking a box. When we involve children and young people we must be truthful about what their involvement means and what difference it will make. The National Participation Standards⁷ were developed with children and young people and set out seven priorities for effective participatory working:

1. Information – young people should accessible information about what’s going to happen, how their involvement is going to make a difference and who is going to listen and let them know so they can make an informed decision about whether they want to be involved.
2. Choice –young people should have enough support and time to decide whether they want to be involved.
3. No discrimination – young people should be treated fairly and the different needs and interests of young people should be respected and there should be a range of opportunities and support to meet their needs.
4. Respect – Young people have the right to their say and their opinions should be respected and valued. Young people should be listened to and their views taken seriously.
5. Reward – young people should benefit from being involved, it should be safe, fun and enjoyable, a positive experience that builds their skills and confidence.
6. Feedback – young people should be told how their views have been used as soon as possible, how they have made a difference and what’s going to happen next.
7. Working better – we should put children’s rights at the heart of everything we do and we should work with children and young people to learn how we can do things better and ensure their views make a difference to the way we make plans and decisions.

⁷ [participationstandards_poster_9](#)

Methods of Engagement

There are a wide range of resources, tools and methods available online, some useful links are listed below. You will already be using many resources in any direct work you are doing but YOU are your greatest resource. How you speak to children and young people and their families, build trusting relationships with them and make them feel valued and respected within the process is just as important, if not more so, than any tools or models that you use.

Participation can be individual one-to-one, group based, verbal, written, virtual or digital. Each method has advantages and different methods will appeal to different children, young people and families. Depending on what you are trying to achieve you may use one or a range of different approaches.

One-to-one - Many of our services involve working one-to-one with children and young people. This can include conversations to involve children directly in decisions that affect them personally and to help inform and evaluate interventions and services as a whole.

Consultation events - well suited to raising awareness/getting feedback on a specific issue, document or development. It can provide an opportunity for children and young people to share their views with other children and young people, service providers, senior managers and councillors, and to develop action plans.

Formal groups - Formal participation groups allow ongoing dialogue with the same individuals over a period of time so are well suited to medium/long-term project work.

Focus groups - When evaluating or creating a project/service, a small group of children and young people can be brought together to hear their views. This also creates an opportunity for co-production, where children and young people are given more power and responsibility.

Consultation and feedback forms – Consultation and feedback forms are used extensively across Children's Services. Care needs to be taken to design forms which are easy to complete and will provide valuable information that will be used to inform and improve services. Individuals should be using standardised forms across teams to allow for more effective analysis.

Social media/Apps - Social media provides the potential to engage young people in ongoing dialogue and promote participation events and groups. The use of social media needs to be carefully thought out and follow the relevant policies and guidelines.

Participation in Children's Services

Involvement in decisions that affect them

Each team in Children's Services will have certain statutory requirements to involve children in decisions that affect them. This will involve at a minimum:

- Every child and young person being spoken and listened to about their experience of the world and what matters to them.
- Every child and young person being actively involved in an on-going way in decisions that affect them in assessments and as family plans, care plans, child protection plans, child looked after plans and pathway plans are being developed.
- Every child/young person's voice being clearly evident in family plans, care and support plans, child protection plans, child looked after plans and pathway plans and the reviews of those plans.
- Children and young people being actively encouraged to use the advocacy service to enable their voices to be better heard.
- Children and young people being actively encouraged to attend and contribute to their own Child Looked After Reviews and Child Protection Case Conferences where appropriate, and their voices being promoted whether or not they are able to attend.

Feedback

Each team should have a mechanism for getting feedback from the children and young people who use its service. This might be through the development of a formal service-user group, focus groups and/or written or digital feedback forms such as Survey Monkey. Feedback should be used to inform and improve practice and guide service development and remove barriers for children and young people accessing the service.

Service development

Children and young people are experts in their own lives and can bring that expertise into the development of better public services.

The views of children and young people should be taken into account where new projects or services are being developed and at an early enough stage for their

views to have impact in decisions being taken. This might involve sharing ideas about the nature of the service and the outcomes you are hoping to achieve and incorporating their views as you develop the service.

Commissioning and procurement

Consideration should be given to involving children and young people in the commissioning and procurement of services that they are going to use. This might include involving them in developing the tender specification (as above) or consulting with them on a specification you have developed and including a young people's panel as part of the decision-making panel.

Recruitment

Children and young people should be involved wherever possible and practicable in the recruitment of staff. A single young person can be disempowered as a panel member on a joint children's/adults panel so think about having a separate child/young person's panel if possible.

Development of Policies

Consideration should be given to consulting with children and young people when major policies are being considered that will affect the services they use or how they can access them. This may require more formal consultation processes such as focus groups.

Data Analysis

Information that you gather from children and young people about their life experiences, what matters to them and their experiences of the services we provide can provide you, your team and children's services with important information that we can use to improve what we do and how we do it, making it more relevant and accessible for children and young people. It can be used to help identify gaps in training, services and resources and provide evidence of good practice that can be promoted and shared.

Things to think about!

- Are you being genuinely inclusive? Think about which young people you are involving and how you can be as inclusive as possible.

- Are you clear about what outcomes you want to achieve and have you communicated these to the young people involved?
- Are the young people you are involving going to be able to make a difference? They should only be asked to contribute in areas where they can actually make a difference. If you aren't going to, or aren't able to listen to what they say don't ask them to contribute.
- Have you got all the resources you need? Make sure you have the right resources to do what you intend to do properly and in a way that respects the young people you are involving. Think about whether it will involve:
 - Time – including preparation time and for training the young people you may be working with
 - Costs – are there transport, venue, refreshments or any other expenses?
 - Training – young people may need upskilling so that real empowerment can be achieved
 - Resources – what else or who else might you need?
- Do the young people you are involving have all the information they need?
- Are you asking them questions they can answer? Young people should only be asked for their views about things they can comment on. For example, if you are recruiting a Team Manager a young person will know about the importance of treating children with respect or building trust, but they won't necessarily know about performance management so think carefully about what you expect and how you support meaningful involvement.
- Have you given them feedback? Young people who have been asked their views should always be told how their views have made a difference and if they haven't, why they haven't.

Some Useful Links

- [Directory of direct work tools to use with children and young people - Childrens \(ccinform.co.uk\)](http://ccinform.co.uk)
- [A Children's Rights Approach for Social Care in Wales - Children's Commissioner for Wales \(childcomwales.org.uk\)](http://childcomwales.org.uk)
- [The Right Way: A Children's Rights Approach in Wales - Children's Commissioner for Wales \(childcomwales.org.uk\)](http://childcomwales.org.uk)
- [http://www.childtochild.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Toolkit for monitoring and evaluating childrens participation book 5 en.pdf](http://www.childtochild.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Toolkit%20for%20monitoring%20and%20evaluating%20childrens%20participation%20book%205%20en.pdf)

Team Evaluation and Action Plan Template

This is not the only way to do it but is provided as a guide to help your team assess where they are in terms of participation and the child's voice and create their team action plan.

Individually or as a team complete the team evaluation below. Some areas will be more or less (or not) relevant to different teams. Use the actions you decide on to complete the action plan.

Involving children and young people in decisions that affect them – what we are going to do			
Thinking about the work we are doing individually and as a team, what decisions are we making that affect children individually and collectively?	How do we currently listen to children and young people?	Where are the gaps, where could we be doing better? Any learning?	Actions

Feedback - getting feedback from children and young people out our service – what are we going to do?			
What mechanisms do we have for getting feedback from children and young people?	How are we using this information to improve our practice/service?	Where are the gaps, where could you be doing better? Any learning?	Actions

Service Development - taking account of the views of children and young people in service development – what we are going to do

What new services, existing services that are being reviewed or new ways of working we are developing could children and young people bring their ideas and expertise into?	How are we going to make sure children and young people have the right information and how are we going to gather and include their expertise?	Where are the gaps, where could we be doing better? Any learning?	Actions

Commissioning and Procurement - involving children and young people in commissioning and procurement - what we are going to do

What services are we commissioning/procuring for children and young people?	How are we going to gather and include the expertise of children and young people?	Where are the gaps, where could we be doing better? Any learning?	Actions

Recruitment - Involving children and young people in recruitment – what we are going to do

What job roles are we recruiting to where the expertise of children and young people would help the recruitment process?	How are we going to identify, support, train and reward the children and young people involved? How are we going to ensure the process is fair and safe for all concerned?	Where are the gaps, where could we be doing better? Any learning?	Actions

Policy - Involving children and young people in the development of policies we are introducing or changing that will significantly affect the services they use or how they access them – what we are going to do

What policies are we writing or updating that directly affect children and young people, the services they receive and/or how they access them?	How are we going to make sure children and young people have the right information and how are we going to gather and include their expertise?	Where are the gaps, where could we be doing better? Any learning?	Actions

Data Analysis - Using the information we gather about children's lives, what matters to them and their experiences of our services to improve what we do – what we are going to do

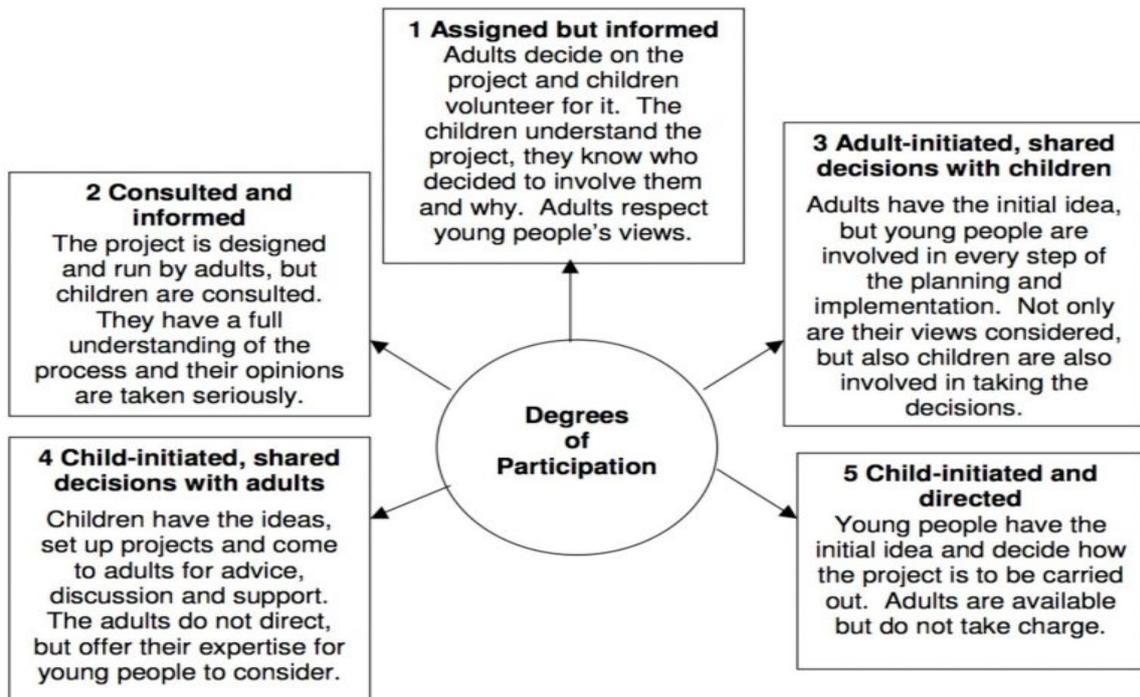
What data do we gather about children and young people, what matters to them and their experiences of our services?	How are we using this to improve our services?	Where are the gaps (services, training, knowledge)? Where could we be doing better? Any learning.	Actions

Team Action Plan

Taking the actions from the team evaluation above

	Actions	How will we know when we have achieved it – what will good look like?	Milestones/progress	Who is responsible	Timescale
Involvement in decisions that affect them					
Feedback					
Service development					
Commissioning and procurement					
Recruitment					
Development of Policies					
Data Analysis					

Treseder's model of participation



1) Assigned but Informed - This is a description of an adult-chosen and led project where it is clear that children and young people can volunteer and be involved but that the direction and governance of the project is owned by the adults within the dynamic. The children and young people are clear that this is an adult-owned project, and they understand the requirements of their volunteering. It is important to stress that they also know that their views, thoughts and impressions will be listened to and respected.

2) Adult-initiated, shared decisions with children - Although adults generate the initial ideas, the subsequent phases of planning and implementation actively involve children. At this level, children's views are considered and they take part in making decisions.

3) Consulted and Informed - With a project or programme designed and run by adults there remains only consultation as a way of involving children. Being consulted requires comprehension of the proposals and an expectation that views expressed are taken seriously. Consultation differs from participation; it is based on asking, not involving.

4) Child-initiated and directed - This stage represents a shift in the power balance; children have the original idea and determine what will happen, when, and how. Adults are available but do not control.

5) Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults - At this stage it is the children who have the ideas, establish the project, and determine when to seek support, advice, and consultation, but not direction from adults.