



**Comisiynydd
Plant Cymru**
Children's
Commissioner
for Wales

Participation in Wales: From Principles to Practice



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Foreword



Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is clear: every child has the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, and to have those views given due weight. This right is fundamental. It is not simply about being listened to, but about being taken seriously and being able to influence decisions that shape children and young people's lives.

In Wales, this principle is reflected in a range of statutory duties on local authorities to involve children and young people in decision making, including Section 12 of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010, and the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015. Together, these frameworks set clear expectations that participation should be meaningful, embedded and impactful.

Over the last year, my team and I have undertaken a listening exercise to look at the effectiveness of youth participation structures established by local authorities to fulfil these duties. Our work has focused on whether these structures are genuinely enabling children and young people to take part in decisions that matter to them, or whether barriers remain that limit their influence.

Through this work, we have gathered evidence of strong and innovative practice, demonstrating the positive impact that effective participation can have on children's lives. We have also identified areas where improvement is needed to ensure that participation is meaningful, inclusive and consistent across Wales.

I would like to thank all the Local Authorities and professionals who engaged with this work for their openness and commitment. I am also grateful to the children and young people we met during our visits, whose perspectives helped to inform and ground our understanding of participation in practice.

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Children's Commissioner for Wales



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Executive Summary

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) establishes every child's right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, and to have those views given due weight. This is a fundamental right and a cornerstone of a Children's Rights Approach.

This report examines the extent to which local authority participation structures are enabling children and young people to influence decisions that affect their lives. It draws on engagement with all local authorities in Wales, including survey responses, in-depth discussions with officers and leaders, and analysis of local practice. It provides a snapshot of the national picture of how participation duties are being interpreted and delivered in practice.

The findings show a clear and genuine commitment to participation across many local authorities, alongside a range of strong and innovative approaches. Examples of good practice include youth councils and forums that are embedded within democratic and scrutiny processes; youth-led and co-produced initiatives that shape services, creative digital engagement methods that broaden reach; and mechanisms such as "You Said, We Did" approaches that strengthen accountability. In some areas, participation is clearly linked to strategic planning, commissioning, and policy development, demonstrating the potential for meaningful influence when it is effectively embedded.

However, this good practice is not consistent across Wales and is often dependent on local leadership, capacity, and resource rather than being systematically embedded. Participation continues to vary significantly in quality, scope and impact, creating what some stakeholders have described as a 'postcode lottery' for children and young people.

Several key barriers are identified. Resource constraints are a central and recurring challenge with many local authorities highlighting limited and short-term funding, insufficient staffing capacity, and high turnover impacting the sustainability of participation work. Structural and systemic barriers within local authorities also restrict meaningful participation, including competing organisational priorities, inflexible decision-making timelines, and processes that do not readily accommodate ongoing engagement with children and young people.

The report also highlights persistent challenges in ensuring participation is inclusive and representative. While there are examples of targeted work, many local authorities acknowledge gaps in engaging children and young people who are marginalised or underrepresented, including disabled children, ethnic minority groups, those living in poverty, and those in rural areas. Participation opportunities are not always designed in ways that address intersecting barriers such as transport, digital exclusion, confidence, and accessibility.

In addition, the findings point to ongoing weaknesses in accountability. While some local authorities demonstrate strong feedback mechanisms and clear lines of communication with children and young people, this is not yet standard practice. Too often, children and young people do not consistently see or understand how their views have influenced decisions, which risks undermining trust and contributing to consultation fatigue.

The report identifies the need for a stronger and more coherent approach to participation at both national and local levels. This includes strengthening statutory duties, improving alignment between existing legislative frameworks, and introducing clearer expectations around participation strategies, monitoring, and reporting. It also highlights the importance of sustained, ring-fenced funding to ensure participation is not reliant on short-term or project-based resources.

An effective Children's Rights Approach requires participation to move beyond one-off engagement or consultation, towards ongoing, meaningful involvement. Children and young people should be supported not only to share their views but to understand their rights, develop the skills and confidence to participate, and play an active role in shaping decisions. Crucially, they must be able to see how their contributions lead to change.

'The Right Way' Framework provides a practical foundation for embedding this approach across public services. It is grounded in five principles: embedding; equality and non-discrimination; empowerment; participation; and, accountability. These offer a clear structure for translating children's rights into practice. While the report identifies evidence of these principles in action, it also highlights that they are not yet applied consistently or systematically across Wales.

Overall, the report concludes that while Wales has a strong legislative and policy framework to support children and young people's participation, this is not yet being realised in a consistent or equitable way in practice across Local Authorities. Delivering on Article 12 requires more than commitment: it requires sustained leadership, adequate resourcing, strengthened accountability, and a cultural shift within public services so that participation is understood and delivered as a core function, rather than an additional activity.

01

Children's Rights and Participation in Wales

Defining participation

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is clear that children have the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, and to have those views listened to, respected, and given due weight. Participation, in this context, is understood to be the active and meaningful involvement of children in decisions that shape their lives.

This right applies to all children without discrimination, as set out in Article 2 of the UNCRC. Every child must be supported to exercise their right to participate, regardless of their background, circumstances, or identity.

Participation can take a wide range of forms and should be appropriate to the child's age, maturity, and circumstances. Children and young people should be supported to engage in decision-making across all aspects of their lives including within their family lives, communities, services, and wider society. While children's views should be given due weight in line with their age and level of understanding, age should never be used as grounds to exclude children from participation or to diminish the value of their views.

For participation to be meaningful, children and young people must be provided with relevant, accessible information and genuine opportunities to influence decisions. There must be clear and transparent processes to demonstrate how their views have been considered, alongside timely and accessible feedback explaining outcomes and the extent of their influence.

Participation should be understood as an ongoing and embedded process, rather than a one-off activity or consultation. It must be safe, inclusive, and enabling, fostering constructive dialogue between children and professionals. Public bodies have a responsibility to identify and remove barriers to participation, ensuring that all children and young people are able to participate on an equitable basis.



Welsh context

Wales has a distinctive and well-established legal and policy framework which places children and young people's participation at the heart of decision-making. This framework is underpinned by a strong and longstanding commitment to children's rights:

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

The Welsh approach to participation is rooted in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Alongside Article 12, several other Articles reinforce children's participative rights:

- Article 2 states that all children have these rights, without discrimination;
- Article 3 requires that the best interests of the child are a primary consideration in all decisions affecting them
- Articles 13 and 15 support freedom of expression and association
- Article 23 highlights the rights of disabled children and the importance of enabling their full participation in society

Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010

The Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 strengthens participation by introducing duties on local authorities to promote and facilitate the participation of children and young people in decision-making. This includes ensuring children and young people are involved in the planning, delivery and review of services.

Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011

The Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 places a statutory duty on Welsh Ministers to have due regard to the UNCRC when exercising their functions. This embeds children's rights within Welsh law and policy, requiring Ministers to consider and demonstrate how their decisions impact on those rights. Participation is recognised within the framework as a fundamental component of rights-based governance.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 further reinforces the importance of participation. It requires public bodies to consider the long-term impact of their decisions and adopt ways of working that actively involve communities in shaping the future. 'Involvement', one of the Act's five ways of working, explicitly highlights the importance of engaging with children and young people in decisions that affect them.



Statutory Guidance

Annex B to Shared Purpose: Shared Future 3 sets out statutory guidance on children and young people's participation, issued under Section 17(3) of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 and Section 51(1) of the Well being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. The guidance explains how participation duties should be understood, discharged and supported within the framework of collective well being, planning and public service delivery.

The guidance is grounded in a rights-based approach, drawing on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), in particular Article 12, which establishes the right of children and young people to express views on matters affecting them and to have those views taken seriously. Participation is framed as a fundamental and enabling right, underpinning wider outcomes for wellbeing and sustainable development.

The statutory duty to promote and facilitate participation rests solely with local authorities. However, Annex B makes clear that effective delivery of this duty requires active collaboration with partners, including those involved in Public Services Boards.

To meet legislative requirements, local authorities are expected to work with relevant partners to promote and facilitate children and young people's participation within the broad context of the UNCRC, as part of their policies, services and wider citizen engagement. This includes ensuring that children and young people are aware of their rights, particularly their right to participate, to have their views heard, and to be involved in decisions about policies and services that affect their lives.

The guidance requires participation to be embedded into all aspects of planning, delivery and review, rather than treated as a discrete or occasional activity. This explicitly includes the assessment of local wellbeing, preparation of the local wellbeing plan, and development of relevant subplans. Participation is expected to inform priorities, shape service design and support continuous improvement over time.

Local authorities are expected to adopt the National Participation Standards as the framework for meeting their statutory participation duties. Adoption of the Standards is positioned as an expectation rather than an option, providing a practical and consistent means of ensuring that participation is meaningful, effective and aligned with children's rights in Wales.

The guidance further requires local authorities to publish information on participation, including the benefits of participation and the arrangements in place to promote and facilitate it. Authorities are encouraged to disseminate examples of good practice using accessible channels such as websites, newsletters and social media, and through links with national participation structures, including Young Wales. Information on participation may also be included in Public Services Board annual progress reports, and children and young people themselves should be supported to play a role in raising awareness of participation.

Annex B places strong emphasis on the quality, clarity and accessibility of information aimed at children and young people. Materials must be easy to understand, accurate, up to date, relevant, and accessible in language and format, and responsive to children and young people's questions and identified needs.

Local authorities are also expected to ensure a range of opportunities and appropriate support for participation, integrating opportunities for individual participation into day-to-day services, alongside specific participation structures. These include forums or groups for children and young people, particularly those who are marginalised, vulnerable or have specialist interests, recognising their role in supporting children and young people to exercise their UNCRC rights.

In addition, the guidance expects authorities to support a County Youth Forum or Youth Council as a representative mechanism through which young people's views can be channelled across the authority and into local and national decision making. These bodies should be inclusive, adequately supported, linked to local democratic structures, and connected to national participation arrangements.

The guidance also commits the Welsh Government to monitoring local arrangements for children and young people's participation. In addition, the guidance provides scope for the Wales Audit Office to review the extent to which children and young people's participation influences the development of local wellbeing plans and local decision making.

Children and Young People's National Participation Standards for Wales

The National Participation Standards for Wales (NPS), first developed in 2007 and updated in 2017, provide a framework to support organisations in embedding effective and rights-based participation. All 22 local authorities in Wales are required to promote and facilitate children and young people's participation and are expected to adopt the Standards in delivering this duty. The NPS set out clear expectations for inclusive, meaningful and well-supported engagement, ensuring that participation is accessible, relevant and impactful. In the context of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, these standards support local authorities and their partners to embed participation as a core part of planning, delivery and review.

Extending the Voter Franchise

The extension of the voting franchise to 16 and 17-year-olds through the Senedd and Elections (Wales) Act 2020 and the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 represents a significant development in recognising young people as active participants in democratic life. These reforms provide young people with a formal role in shaping local and national decisions, reinforcing the importance of participation as a fundamental right. In this context, participation within public services must align with this wider democratic entitlement, ensuring that children and young people are supported not only to vote, but to engage meaningfully in decision-making processes that affect their lives.

The Right Way

The Right Way is the Children's Commissioner for Wales' framework for embedding a Children's Rights Approach across public services. It provides practical guidance for translating the UNCRC into everyday practice, structured around five key principles: Embedding, Equality and Non-Discrimination, Empowerment, Participation, and Accountability. The framework emphasises that children's rights should be fully integrated into organisational culture, decision-making and



service delivery, rather than treated as an add-on. Within this report, The Right Way provides the analytical framework for assessing local authority participation practice and identifying both areas of strength and opportunities for improvement.

Youth Work Statutory Framework

The publication of Youth Work in Wales: Delivering for Young People in March 2026 introduces a significant new statutory framework for the planning, delivery and monitoring of youth work across Wales. This framework, underpinned by the Youth Support Services (Provision of Youth Work) (Wales) Directions 2026, places clear duties on local authorities and their partners to provide a distinct youth work offer, supported by national standards and structured through five-year strategic plans. These plans are required to set out priorities based on evidence of young people's needs, alongside arrangements for partnership working, monitoring and accountability.

The framework has direct relevance to participation. It emphasises that youth work must be shaped through active engagement with young people, aligned with the UNCRC and existing participation duties, and requires local authorities to strengthen participation structures, improve accessibility, and ensure feedback mechanisms are in place. It also highlights the role of youth work in reaching underrepresented groups and supporting confidence, skills and agency, reinforcing its importance as a key delivery mechanism for meaningful participation. As such, the framework provides a strengthened statutory basis for embedding participation within local systems and offers a critical opportunity to address some of the inconsistencies and barriers identified in this report.

Together, these frameworks establish a clear legal and policy expectation that children and young people's participation should be embedded across public services in Wales. They provide a strong foundation for ensuring that children's rights are recognised, respected and realised in practice across sectors including in education, health, social care and wider public policy. However, as this report demonstrates, there remains a gap between legislative expectations and their consistent implementation. Barriers relating to resourcing, systems, and practice continue to affect how effectively participation is embedded, limiting the extent to which children and young people are able to influence decisions on a meaningful basis across Wales.



02

Methodology

This report draws on a national programme of engagement with all 22 local authorities in Wales to assess the effectiveness of youth participation structures and their contribution to delivering children's rights in practice. The approach was designed to provide a robust and well-rounded evidence base, combining quantitative and qualitative insights and enabling cross-Wales comparison.

Methods

The work was delivered in four stages:

Stage 1 – Local Authority Survey: In July 2025, all Local Authorities in Wales were invited to complete a short, structured survey. This exercise was designed as an initial desktop scoping activity to gather high-level information on participation arrangements, including governance and staffing structures, participation methods, and the extent to which participation is embedded in practice.

The initial results provided a broad overview of participation activity across Wales, helping to identify emerging themes, variations and areas for further exploration. Rather than serving as a standalone evidence base, this stage was used to inform and shape the subsequent in-depth engagement visits with local authorities.

Stage 2 – Local Authority Engagement Visits: Between July and December 2025, the Children's Commissioner for Wales and her team undertook visits to every local authority. These visits included discussions with senior leaders, participation leads and relevant officers responsible for delivering participation duties.

The visits provided the opportunity to explore the survey findings in greater depth, allowing for detailed discussions of local approaches, challenges and enablers. They also enabled the identification of contextual factors influencing delivery, including organisational priorities, resource constraints and system-level barriers. While the primary focus of the visits was engagement with professionals, some local authorities facilitated opportunities to hear directly from children and young people. These contributions provided additional context and helped to ground the findings in lived experience although they are not presented here as a representative evidence base.

Stage 3 – The Right Way Survey: The report is further informed by analysis of emerging findings from the 2026 The Right Way (TRW) Survey. This survey provides a complementary, national-level dataset capturing the experiences of children and young people, alongside professionals working with them.

The analysis focused on key areas relevant to participation and children's rights in practice, including:

- children and young people's opportunities to have a voice in decisions
- the extent to which they feel listened to and able to influence outcomes
- awareness and understanding of children's rights, including the UNCRC
- access to, and perceptions of, participation structures such as school councils and youth forums.

The data includes responses from 3,523 children and young people aged 7–18, and 215 professionals, across a range of settings including primary and secondary schools and youth provision. This large and diverse sample provides a strong quantitative foundation for identifying system-level trends and variations across age groups and contexts.

The TRW findings were used to triangulate the insights gathered from local authorities, helping to test the extent to which reported structures and approaches are reflected in children and young people's experiences in practice.

Stage 4: Thematic Analysis

Analysis of the evidence gathered through this project was framed by The Right Way Framework, which sets out a Children's Rights Approach for public bodies in Wales. This framework provides a clear structure for translating children's rights into practice, underpinned by five core principles:

- **Embedding:** Ensuring children's rights are embedded across policy, planning and service delivery
- **Equality and Non-Discrimination:** Ensuring all children can participate on an equitable basis
- **Empowerment:** Supporting children and young people to understand and exercise their rights
- **Participation:** Enabling meaningful and sustained involvement in decision-making
- **Accountability:** Demonstrating how children's views influence outcomes

These principles were used as an analytical lens to assess the extent to which participation is being delivered in line with a Children's Rights Approach across local authorities.

A thematic analysis was then undertaken across all data collected through the project, including survey responses, evidence from local authority visits, and insights drawn from The Right Way survey. This involved systematic review and coding of the data to identify recurring patterns, areas of strength, and common challenges.

The analysis focused on:

- identifying examples of effective and innovative practice
- understanding the key barriers affecting delivery
- exploring how participation is experienced and implemented in practice
- assessing alignment between statutory expectations and delivery on the ground

Findings are presented thematically within the report, structured around the Right Way principles. This approach ensures that the analysis remains grounded in a recognised children's rights framework, while providing a clear and consistent basis for identifying good practice, gaps, and areas for improvement.

Strengths and Limitations

This methodology provides a comprehensive and robust national overview, drawing on evidence from all local authorities in Wales and combining practitioner insight with quantitative data from children and young people. The integration of survey data, in-depth engagement through local authority visits, and wider supporting evidence strengthens the overall reliability and depth of the findings, allowing for both system-level analysis and contextual understanding.

The approach places particular emphasis on understanding how participation duties are being delivered in practice by those responsible for implementation. This provides valuable insight into organisational structures, challenges, and enablers across Wales.

Opportunities were also taken, where available, to hear directly from children and young people during local visits, helping to inform and contextualise the findings. In addition, the inclusion of data from The Right Way (TRW) Survey ensures that the analysis is grounded in a broad and diverse evidence base reflecting children and young people's experiences across Wales.

While this project does not present a fully representative account of children and young people's views, the combined evidence base provides a strong foundation for identifying key themes, patterns, and areas for improvement. Together, these methods offer a balanced and well-evidenced assessment of participation practice across Wales.





Findings

Introduction

This chapter brings together evidence from all 22 local authorities alongside findings from The Right Way (TRW) Survey, providing a national picture of how participation is being delivered in practice. It draws on both qualitative insights from local authority engagement and quantitative data from over 3,500 children and young people.

Across Wales, there is clear commitment to participation, with all local authorities demonstrating established structures such as youth councils, forums, and consultation processes. The evidence highlights a diverse and evolving range of approaches, including youth-led initiatives, large-scale consultations, and creative digital engagement. In many areas, children and young people are influencing service design, recruitment processes and local decision-making.

However, while participation is well established in principle, its quality, reach and impact remain variable. Practice is often strongest where there is dedicated capacity and leadership, and less consistent where it relies on individual services or short-term resources.

A key finding is that the presence of participation structures does not always translate into meaningful influence. While many children and young people report opportunities to share their views, fewer feel that those views shape decisions. The evidence also highlights ongoing inequalities in participation, with some groups of children and young people less likely to be reached or heard.

Overall, the findings show that Wales has strong foundations for participation, but that further progress is needed to ensure it is consistently meaningful, inclusive and impactful.

The analysis is structured around the principles of The Right Way Framework: Embedding, Equality and Non-Discrimination, Empowerment, Participation and Accountability.

Detailed local authority profiles, setting out the full range of practice across Wales, are provided in the Appendix.



Embedding

Embedding participation requires both specialist capacity, investment and leadership at a corporate level alongside recognition that participation is a core responsibility for all staff and services. It is evident where children's rights and participation are integrated across organisational systems, governance and decision-making processes, rather than delivered as standalone or time-limited activity.

Across Wales, there is clear evidence of progress. Participation is increasingly being incorporated within corporate planning, commissioning, scrutiny and partnership working, supported by dedicated roles, policies and frameworks. There is also evidence that consideration of children and young people's health and wellbeing is included in decision-making through integrated impact assessments. However, the use of Children's Rights Impact Assessments (CRIAs) remains inconsistent. While some authorities demonstrate more developed practice, this is not yet systematic across Wales, meaning children's rights are not always explicitly evidenced within decision-making processes.

While these developments represent important progress, embedding remains uneven across services and contexts.

The Right Way Survey: What children and young people told us

Quantitative findings indicate that participation opportunities are visible but are not always experienced as embedded within decision-making.

- 67% of children and young people report having opportunities to take part in decisions
- However, only around one-third feel able to influence decisions such as policies or how resources are used
- 38% report uncertainty about whether their views are acted upon

These findings suggest that while structures exist, participation is not consistently experienced as part of core organisational processes, and its impact is not always clear.

Good Practice

Across Wales, there are strong and increasingly well-developed examples of embedding participation within organisational systems, demonstrating what is possible when leadership, capacity and structures are aligned.

At a strategic level, participation is being integrated into corporate governance and decision-making frameworks. In several authorities, children and young people are directly connected to formal structures such as scrutiny committees, Cabinet engagement and corporate planning processes, enabling their views to inform policy, strategy and service development.

There is also clear evidence of participation informing commissioning and service design, with young people contributing to identifying priorities, shaping delivery models and evaluating provision. Large-scale engagement mechanisms (such as ballots, surveys and youth-led consultations) are used in some areas to provide a robust evidence base for decision-making.

Cardiff: Child-Friendly City

Participation is embedded through a coordinated, city-wide approach led by the Child Friendly City (CFC) team, which provides strategic oversight and supports capacity-building across council services. This distributed model enables individual departments and scrutiny processes (across planning, transport and education) to lead their own engagement, while drawing on central expertise to ensure consistency and alignment with children's rights.

The CFC team plays a key role in strengthening practice by supporting staff, providing tools and guidance, and enabling services to commission research and participation activity where needed, including to inform policy development and Children's Rights Impact Assessments (CRIAs). Together, this demonstrates a mature model where participation is embedded across planning, decision-making and service delivery, supported by both central leadership and service-level ownership.

Caerphilly: County Borough Youth Forum

Caerphilly youth forum engages with young people through school councils and youth services and has great collaboration with children's services. This structure is embedded within the authority and has a small team of staff based in the youth service to support the Youth Forum. They also have a Youth Champion who is currently the Deputy Leader. There is a clear structure of participation where

young people raise issues in schools/ groups each year. These are taken to an annual youth led forum conference, where they are discussed and prioritised and are then the subject of a forum wide online ballot (2472 young took part last year) and the resulting priority issues voted for by young people form the Youth Forum's work for the year ahead.

Flintshire: Young Flintshire

Participation is embedded across multiple policy areas with young people shaping strategic priorities such as climate change, corporate parenting and service delivery. The "Young Flintshire" model links school councils and youth services

into a coordinated system, creating clear pathways for participation from local settings into strategic decision-making.

Swansea: Rights-based governance

Participation is embedded through a structured, cross-service approach underpinned by a strong commitment to the UNCRC and a human rights-based approach. This is reflected in the council's "Big Conversation", a large-scale engagement process that captures the views and priorities of children and young people and feeds directly into service planning and delivery.

Targeted participation groups (e.g. care-experienced young people and those involved in the youth justice system) are connected into wider governance and decision-making processes, supported by dedicated participation and youth work teams. Together, this demonstrates how a rights-based commitment to participation is translated into practice, with clear routes from engagement into organisational systems and decision-making.

Pembrokeshire: What matters to you

The "What Matters to You" youth ballot provides a strong, large-scale evidence base for participation, reaching over 5,000 young people. Findings are used to inform service planning and are linked directly

to delivery through the Youth Assembly, ensuring a clear line between engagement and action.

Across these examples, participation is supported by clear leadership, robust structures and sustained investment, enabling it to move beyond consultation and demonstrably influence decisions and outcomes.

Areas for Improvement

Despite clear examples of strong practice, embedding participation remains inconsistent and uneven across Wales, with several systemic challenges limiting its effectiveness.

A key issue is variation across and within local authority services. While participation is often well developed within youth services, it is less systematically embedded across:

- Education and schools, where approaches to learner voice vary widely and are not always connected to wider local authority or strategic decision-making processes
- Wider corporate services, where participation may be viewed as an additional requirement rather than integral to planning, policy development and commissioning
- Partner organisations and regional structures, including Public Service Boards and Regional Partnership Boards, where engagement is not always embedded, coordinated or clearly connected to decision-making

As a result, participation is often dependent on individual teams, leadership and funding, rather than embedded consistently across whole organisations.

Local authorities also identified capacity and resourcing challenges, including:

- Reliance on short-term or grant funding
- Limited staffing and time to support meaningful participation
- Increasing demand across services to engage children and young people

There are also gaps in the consistent application of children's rights frameworks. While integrated impact assessments are used in some contexts, the use of dedicated CRIAs is not yet systematic, limiting the visibility and accountability of how children's rights inform decisions.

Organisational culture and understanding remain key barriers. Participation is not yet universally recognised as a shared organisational responsibility, and where it is seen primarily as the role of specialist teams, this can limit ownership, consistency and impact across services.

In addition, structural constraints can restrict embedding, including:

- Decision-making timelines that do not allow for meaningful engagement
- Complex governance processes that are difficult for children and young people to access
- Systems that are not designed to support ongoing participation

Finally, there are inequalities in how participation is embedded and experienced, with some groups of children and young people less likely to be reached through existing structures due to barriers related to geography, poverty, disability or confidence.

Key Insight

Embedding participation is increasingly evident within structures and systems across Wales. However, it is not yet consistently realised in practice.

The key challenge is moving from participation being built into processes to being consistently experienced by children and young people as influencing decisions, through whole-organisation ownership supported by sustained leadership, investment and accountability.

Equality and Non Discrimination

Equality and non-discrimination require that all children and young people can participate on an equitable basis, regardless of their background, identity or circumstances. This means not only providing opportunities to participate but actively identifying and addressing barriers that prevent some groups from engaging or being heard.

Across Wales, there is clear recognition of the importance of inclusive participation. Local authorities have developed a range of approaches to reach different groups of children and young people, with increasing emphasis on adaptability and targeted engagement. However, the extent to which participation is experienced equitably remains variable.

Despite this progress, the evidence highlights that inclusive participation is not yet consistently embedded in practice. Local authorities identified ongoing challenges in reaching and sustaining engagement with certain groups of children and young people, particularly those facing multiple or intersecting barriers. These include issues relating to awareness of opportunities, confidence to participate, accessibility of provision, and the extent to which participation opportunities are designed with diverse needs in mind. As a result, participation can remain uneven, with some voices more consistently heard and represented than others, reinforcing existing inequalities in influence and decision-making.

The Right Way Survey: What children and young people told us

Quantitative findings highlight gaps in awareness, access and inclusion within participation structures.

- Awareness and engagement vary by age and context, with older young people reporting lower levels of participation
- A proportion of children and young people are uncertain about how to get involved or feel participation is not relevant or accessible to them. For example, 45% are unsure whether they have the chance to have their say in school-based forums, and 38% do not know whether they are listened to. This, alongside the finding that 60% are unaware of local youth forums, suggests that participation pathways are not always clear, visible or accessible.

These findings suggest that, while opportunities exist, they are not always visible, accessible or inclusive, particularly for those who are less confident or less connected to formal structures.

Good Practice

Across Wales, there are strong examples of local authorities taking proactive steps to promote inclusive participation and address barriers.

Many authorities have developed multiple participation pathways, recognising that no single mechanism will reach all children and young people. These include youth councils, targeted forums, school-based participation, and community or outreach engagement, often supported through partnerships with third sector organisations.

There is also evidence of targeted approaches to support specific groups, including:

- Dedicated forums for care-experienced children and young people
- Adapted participation for children with additional learning needs or disabilities
- Outreach work with children and young people who are less likely to engage through formal structures

Vale of Glamorgan: Her Voice Wales

Her Voice Wales is a girls-led participation project supporting young women to explore issues affecting them, with a focus on safety and gender equality. Through the #WeDontFeelSafe campaign, participants gathered evidence on experiences of harassment and presented findings directly to decision-makers, including Council Cabinet and Welsh Government.

The project has influenced local safety initiatives, such as Safe Places schemes and awareness of reporting mechanisms, and has been recognised nationally through a Youth Work Excellence Award.

This demonstrates how targeted, youth-led participation can ensure young women's voices directly inform decisions and drive change.

Wrexham: Tailored Structures

Wrexham has developed a range of participation structures designed to support engagement with children and young people who face additional barriers, including those with additional learning needs, care-experienced young people and those involved in youth justice. Approaches include tailored forums, supported engagement and partnership working with specialist services. These pathways are designed not only to

enable participation but to ensure that the views of these groups inform planning, service design and review processes. The emphasis on sustained engagement and integration into decision-making structures demonstrates a commitment to moving beyond access alone towards meaningful inclusion.



Areas for Improvement

Despite clear intent and examples of good practice, participation is not yet consistently equitable across Wales.

A key challenge is the underrepresentation of certain groups within participation structures. Local authorities highlighted ongoing difficulties in consistently engaging:

- Disabled children and those with additional learning needs
- Children from ethnic minority backgrounds and Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities
- Children not engaged in mainstream education
- Young people living in rural or geographically isolated areas

These challenges are often compounded by socioeconomic and intersectional barriers where multiple factors interact to limit access and engagement. These include:

- Transport and geographical constraints, particularly in rural areas
- Digital exclusion, including access and confidence
- Limited awareness of participation opportunities

In some cases, inclusion is supported through separate or targeted structures, rather than being embedded across all participation mechanisms. While valuable, this can sometimes limit opportunities for broader representation and influence within mainstream decision-making processes.

There are also gaps in:

- Consistency of inclusive practice across services
- Workforce confidence and skills in engaging diverse groups
- Data and understanding of who is and is not participating

Together, these factors contribute to uneven participation outcomes and limit the extent to which all children and young people can influence decisions on an equal basis.

Key Insight

There is strong commitment across Wales to inclusive participation, supported by a range of targeted and adaptable approaches. However, participation is not yet consistently equitable, with significant variation in who is able to access, engage with and influence decision-making.

The key challenge is to ensure that participation is not only available, but accessible, visible and meaningful for all children and young people, particularly those who are currently underrepresented or face additional barriers.

Empowerment

Empowerment requires that children and young people are supported to understand their rights, build confidence, and develop the skills needed to participate meaningfully in decisions that affect their lives. Empowerment moves participation beyond consultation, enabling children and young people to act as informed and active contributors.

Across Wales, there is clear recognition of the importance of empowering children and young people within participation practice. Many local authorities are investing in opportunities that support leadership, skills development and rights awareness, often through youth work and participation programmes. These approaches demonstrate an understanding that meaningful participation depends not only on opportunity, but on the capacity of children and young people to engage confidently and effectively.

However, the extent to which empowerment is embedded consistently remains variable. While there are strong examples of practice, empowerment is not always sustained or systematically developed across all services. This can result in participation opportunities that are accessible, but not always fully enabling children and young people to influence decisions.

The Right Way Survey: What children and young people told us

Findings from the TRW survey highlight a clear distinction between awareness of rights and the ability to exercise them in practice.

- 87% of children and young people report having heard of children's rights
- 36% have not heard of the UNCRC, and a further proportion are unsure
- Awareness and engagement vary by age and context, with older young people reporting lower levels of participation
- Confidence to participate and influence decisions varies significantly, particularly among older young people.

These figures highlight a gap between general awareness and deeper understanding of rights in practice. Although the concept of rights is well known, a lack of specific knowledge of the UNCRC points to a more superficial understanding. This suggests that children and young people may struggle to recognise when their rights are being upheld or are breached.

Children and young people also identified the importance of:

- Understanding how decisions are made and who makes them
- Having the confidence and support to express their views
- Being able to see how their contributions lead to change

A notable finding is that while many children and young people report opportunities to participate, they do not always feel empowered to influence outcomes. This is reflected in lower levels of reported influence over key decisions such as policies and resource allocation. Confidence to engage also appears to decline with age, suggesting that existing participation structures are not always supporting sustained empowerment over time.

Taken together, these findings suggest that while awareness of rights is relatively strong, this is not consistently translating into awareness of how to participate, confidence to engage, or meaningful influence, highlighting a gap between knowledge and practice. Where children and young people may recognise their rights in principle but are not routinely supported by existing participation structures to exercise them in meaningful and impactful ways.

Good Practice

Across Wales, there are strong examples of approaches that actively support children and young people to build confidence, skills and understanding, enabling meaningful participation.

These approaches are characterised by:

- Ongoing engagement, rather than one-off consultation
- Opportunities for leadership and co-production
- Support from trusted professionals to build confidence and skills
- Clear links between participation and decision-making processes

These approaches are most effective where empowerment is understood as a continuous process, supported through sustained relationships, accessible information, and opportunities for children and young people to develop skills and influence over time.

Powys: Junior Start Well Board

In Powys, The Junior Start Well Board (JSWB) has delivered several impactful, youth-led initiatives that have directly improved services for young people. They designed and launched a Youth Café in Newtown, creating a safe, welcoming space with Wi-Fi, refreshments, and youth worker support, addressing a clear gap identified by their peers.

Following the pandemic, JSWB conducted a county-wide emotional health survey, which led to the reinstatement of school nurses and informed future wellbeing initiatives.

Their advocacy work has influenced regional policy, including contributions to the NYTH/NEST Framework through direct engagement with senior Welsh Government officials. They also developed plans for mental health assemblies in schools and expanded representation by forming a group for 18–25-year-olds.

This demonstrates how sustained support and meaningful involvement in decision-making can build confidence and enable young people to influence outcomes.

Merthyr Tydfil: Youth-led rights training to professionals

In Merthyr Tydfil, young people are supported to deliver training to professionals on children's rights and participation. This approach builds confidence, communication skills and understanding of decision-making processes, while also shifting power dynamics by positioning young people as

credible contributors to organisational learning. By embedding youth-led training within workforce development, this model demonstrates how empowerment can extend beyond participation activities into influencing practice and culture.

Across these examples, empowerment is achieved through sustained support, meaningful roles and clear connections to decision-making, enabling children and young people to move from participation to influence.

Areas for Improvement

Despite strong examples of practice, empowerment is not yet consistently embedded across Wales. A key issue is the gap between awareness of children's rights and deeper understanding of how to apply them in practice. While many children and young people are aware of their rights, fewer have the knowledge or confidence to use them as a basis for engagement, advocacy or challenge.

The finding that 60% of children and young people do not know whether a youth forum exists highlights a significant gap in the visibility and accessibility of participation arrangements. Without clear routes into participation, children and young people are less able to build confidence, develop skills or exercise their rights.

There are also ongoing challenges relating to:

- Confidence and self-esteem, particularly for younger children and those facing additional barriers
- Limited opportunities for sustained engagement, with participation often short-term or project-based
- Variability in access to training, support and capacity-building opportunities

Local authorities highlighted the need to strengthen:

- Workforce confidence and skills in supporting empowerment across all services
- Provision of clear, accessible information about rights and decision-making processes
- Opportunities for children and young people to understand how their views influence change

Structural barriers also impact on empowerment, including limited time and resources, competing priorities, and inconsistent approaches across services. As a result, empowerment is often dependent on specific programmes or teams, rather than being embedded across whole organisations.

Key Insight

There are strong examples across Wales of children and young people being supported to develop the confidence and skills needed to participate meaningfully. However, empowerment is not yet consistently realised, with a clear gap between awareness of rights and the ability to exercise them in practice.

The key challenge is ensuring that children and young people are not only informed about their rights, but are supported over time to understand, apply and use them, enabling sustained participation and meaningful influence in decision-making.

Participation

Participation requires that children and young people are provided with meaningful, ongoing opportunities to influence decisions that affect their lives, in line with Article 12 of the UNCRC. It goes beyond consultation, requiring that children and young people are actively involved in shaping decisions, and that their views contribute to the development of policies, services and priorities.

Across Wales, participation is well-established in principle, with all local authorities demonstrating a wide range of structures and approaches to support engagement. These include youth councils, forums, consultations and wider engagement mechanisms. The extension of the democratic franchise to 16 and 17-year-olds further reinforces the expectation that young people are active participants in civic and democratic life.

However, the extent to which participation is meaningful, sustained and influential remains variable. While opportunities to participate are widely available, they do not always result in children and young people having a clear or consistent influence over decisions. In many cases, participation is strongest at a local or service level, with more limited involvement in strategic or corporate decision-making.

The Right Way Survey: What children and young people told us

Findings from the TRW survey indicate that participation opportunities are widely available, but their impact is not always clear or consistent.

- 67% of children and young people report that they have opportunities to take part in decisions
- However, nearly 44% of secondary-aged young people report not having a say on key issues such as bullying, online safety or play
- Only around one-third feel able to influence decisions relating to policies or how resources are used

Children and young people also highlighted:

- A lack of clarity about how their views contribute to decisions
- A perception that participation can feel tokenistic, repetitive or one-off
- The importance of opportunities that feel relevant, timely and connected to real-life issues

There is also a clear expectation that participation should reflect how children and young people communicate and engage, including through digital and online platforms, alongside face-to-face opportunities.

Confidence in participation appears to decline with age. While younger children often report positive experiences, older young people are more likely to feel disconnected from participation structures. This is particularly significant in the context of Votes at 16, where young people are recognised as democratic participants but do not always feel equally empowered within local decision-making.

Taken together, these findings suggest that while participation is visible and frequent, it is not consistently experienced as meaningful, relevant or influential, particularly in relation to strategic decisions or issues that matter most to young people.

Good Practice

Across Wales, there are strong examples of participation that demonstrate how children and young people can be meaningfully involved in decision-making when the right conditions are in place.

Effective practice is characterised by:

- Ongoing and sustained engagement, rather than one-off consultation
- Opportunities for co-production and shared decision-making
- Clear routes from participation into decision-making and delivery
- Visible links between children and young people's views and areas of change or development

Participation is increasingly linked to broader democratic engagement with young people involved in governance processes, youth councils and civic initiatives that support understanding of participation as part of democratic life.

Local authorities are also developing digital engagement approaches to complement traditional methods. These include online consultations, virtual forums, social media engagement and youth-led digital content. When used effectively, these approaches extend reach, improve accessibility and reflect how children and young people engage in other parts of their lives.

These approaches are most effective where participation is embedded throughout the full decision-making cycle; from identifying priorities through to design, delivery and review.

Blaenau Gwent: Young people's involvement in staff recruitment

In Blaenau Gwent, young people play an active role in the recruitment process within the Youth Service by participating in staff interviews. Their involvement ensures that candidates are assessed not only in professional competencies but also on their ability to engage meaningfully with

young people. This inclusive approach empowers young people, promotes shared decision-making, and helps appoint staff who are better aligned with the values, needs, and expectations of the young people they will support.



Conwy: Corporate Pledge

In Conwy, a corporate pledge approach requires services to engage with young people as part of planning and decision-making. The Youth Council provides a structured route for young people to influence corporate priorities, strengthening links between participation and governance.

Denbighshire: Digital Engagement

Denbighshire has developed youth-led digital engagement approaches, including podcasts and digital media projects, enabling young people to explore and share their views on issues that matter to them. These methods provide accessible alternatives to traditional forums and help

engage those less likely to participate in formal structures. By connecting digital outputs with decision-makers, this approach demonstrates how digital engagement can support inclusive and flexible participation.

Areas for Improvement

Despite clear progress, participation is not yet consistently meaningful or influential across Wales. A key issue is the gap between opportunity and influence. While participation opportunities are widely available, they do not always translate into meaningful involvement in decision-making, particularly at strategic or corporate levels.

Common challenges include:

- Participation being time-limited, reactive or consultation-based, rather than embedded and proactive
- Limited opportunities for children and young people to engage in the early stages of decision-making, where influence is greatest
- Lack of clarity about how participation informs policy development, planning and resource allocation

There are also inconsistencies across services and local authorities, resulting in variation in the quality and impact of participation.

While digital engagement offers opportunities to broaden reach, it also presents challenges:

- Digital exclusion, including access, connectivity and confidence
- Inconsistent use of digital tools across services
- Risk of digital engagement being used in place of, rather than alongside, meaningful interaction

Participation structures do not always reflect the evolving needs of children and young people. In particular:

- Opportunities may not remain relevant for older young people, including those eligible to vote
- Structures may not fully connect participation with wider democratic and civic engagement
- Engagement methods are not always adapted to different levels of confidence, interest or experience

These factors limit the extent to which participation supports children and young people to act as active and informed participants in local decision-making and democratic life.

Key Insight

Participation is well-established across Wales and sits within a wider context of democratic reform, including Votes at 16, which recognises young people as active citizens. However, participation is not yet consistently meaningful or influential, with a clear gap between opportunities to engage and the ability to shape decisions.

The key challenge is to move from participation as engagement activity to participation as shared and sustained decision-making, supported by flexible, inclusive approaches (including effective use of digital engagement) that reflect how children and young people live and participate in society today.



Accountability

Accountability requires that children and young people are able to see and understand how their views influence decisions, and that public bodies can clearly demonstrate how children's rights are being considered and realised in practice. It is a core principle of a Children's Rights Approach, ensuring that participation leads to transparency, responsibility and learning.

Accountability is not limited to providing feedback. It includes having systems, processes and cultures in place that enable children and young people to hold decision-makers to account, and that ensure decisions can be clearly linked to children and young people's views. This requires clear communication, accessible information and a commitment to openness within organisations.

Across Wales, there is evidence that local authorities recognise the importance of accountability and are taking steps to strengthen practice. However, the extent to which accountability is consistently embedded and experienced by children and young people remains variable.

The Right Way Survey: What children and young people told us

Findings from the TRW survey highlight significant uncertainty among children and young people about how their views are used.

- 48% of children and young people report that they feel listened to
- However, 38% say they "don't know" whether they are listened to
- Many children and young people are unclear about what happens after they share their views

Children and young people also highlighted:

- A lack of clear information about decision-making processes and outcomes
- Difficulty understanding how decisions are reached and who is responsible
- Frustration when participation does not lead to visible change

This uncertainty suggests that accountability is not consistently visible or understood. Even where participation is taking place, children and young people do not always have a clear sense of how their views are influencing decisions, limiting trust and confidence in participative processes.

Good Practice

Across Wales, there are examples of local authorities taking proactive steps to strengthen accountability and ensure that participation leads to visible outcomes.

Effective practice is characterised by:

- Clear and accessible communication about decisions and outcomes
- Systems that demonstrate how children and young people's views have been considered

- Opportunities for children and young people to engage directly with decision-makers
- Transparency about what can and cannot be changed, and why

These approaches are most effective where accountability is seen as an ongoing process, rather than a one-off response following consultation.

Torfaen: Take Over Days

Torfaen run 'Take Over days', where children and young people step into leadership and decision-making roles across the council and partner organisations. Young people apply for these roles and spend time working alongside senior leaders, contributing

their views on key issues and priorities. The programme provides opportunities for children and young people to challenge and question decision-makers directly; strengthening accountability and ensuring their views influence decision-making.

Bridgend: Feedback Loops

Bridgend has developed a 'You Said, We Did' approach to demonstrate how young people's feedback is used to shape and improve its Youth Support Service. Feedback gathered from young people is reviewed and used to inform service development, with updates provided

to show what action has been taken in response. This creates a clear feedback loop, helping young people see how their views have influenced decisions and providing a strong example of accountability in practice.

Areas for Improvement

Despite clear examples of good practice, accountability is not yet consistently embedded across Wales. A key challenge is the visibility of decision-making and outcomes. Local authorities acknowledged that while participation activity takes place, it is not always clear:

- how children and young people's views are considered
- how decisions are made
- what changes have resulted from children and young people's participation



This lack of clarity contributes to uncertainty among children and young people and can reduce trust in participation processes.

There are also challenges relating to:

- Consistency of approaches across services, with accountability more developed in some areas than others
- Limited use of clear and accessible communication methods, particularly for younger children or those with additional needs
- Lack of systematic approaches to tracking and evidencing the impact of participation

Organisational factors also play a role. These include:

- Complex governance processes that are difficult to communicate
- Limited time and resource to provide clear and timely updates
- Competing priorities that can reduce focus on accountability

In addition, local authorities identified the need to strengthen:

- Clarity about what participation can influence, managing expectations appropriately
- Opportunities for children and young people to engage in ongoing dialogue, rather than one-off interactions
- Mechanisms that enable children and young people to challenge and question decisions in a meaningful way

These factors mean that, despite strong intentions, accountability is not yet consistently experienced by children and young people as part of participation.

Key Insight

Accountability is critical to ensuring that participation is meaningful and trusted. While there are strong examples of practice, accountability is not yet consistently visible or understood, with many children and young people unclear about how their views influence decisions. The key challenge is to move from participation that collects views to participation that demonstrates impact, supported by clear, accessible and consistent approaches that enable children and young people to understand, question and influence decisions over time.

04

Recommendations



Embedding Children's Rights

1. Welsh Government should update and strengthen participation duties on local authorities to reassert children and young people's participation as a core requirement for local policy development. This should include a statutory duty for local authorities to publish Children and Young People's Participation Strategies; setting out governance arrangements, participation pathways, inclusion approaches and how children and young people's views influence decision-making.
2. Welsh Government should ensure that the new statutory youth work framework is fully aligned with wider participation duties, including clear expectations on local authorities to integrate participation structures, rights-based approaches and feedback mechanisms into local youth work strategies.
3. Local authorities should ensure that children and young people's participation is adequately and sustainably resourced so that Participation Strategies are deliverable in practice. This should include sufficient staffing, capacity and infrastructure to support consistent and meaningful engagement across all services, supported by increased and sustained investment from Welsh Government to enable effective delivery across all local authority areas.
4. Local authorities and Public Services Boards should embed The Right Way and ensure that children and young people's participation is embedded as a whole-organisation responsibility, with clear leadership, accountability and expectations across all services and relevant partnerships structures.
5. Welsh Government and local authorities should ensure consistent, high-quality children's rights and participation training is available across all services, including for staff and elected members, supported by national resources and clear expectations on uptake.
6. Alongside ongoing support for the All Wales Participation Workers' Network (AWPWN), the Welsh Government should establish and support regional networks to meet in person to strengthen coordination, cooperation, and capacity building.
7. Welsh Government should continue to work with the AWPWN to develop an Online Hub to support the development and sharing of participatory resources (distinct from Hwb, which applies only to formal education).





Equality and Non-discrimination

8. Local authorities should undertake targeted work, supported by dedicated funding, to ensure marginalised groups (particularly Black minority ethnic and disabled children and young people) are represented and supported to engage in participation structures.



Empowerment

9. Local authorities should ensure that participation opportunities and structures are clearly visible and accessible to all children and young people, including through consistent communication, digital engagement and age-appropriate information on how to get involved and influence decisions.



Participation

10. Local authorities should ensure that participation is clearly linked to strategic and corporate decision-making processes, including governance, commissioning and budgeting, rather than being limited to service-level engagement.
11. Local authorities should ensure that participation opportunities remain relevant and accessible to children and young people of all ages, particularly older young people, including those transitioning into adulthood and participating in wider democratic processes.
12. Local authorities should ensure that digital participation methods are used alongside face-to-face engagement in a planned and inclusive way, reflecting how children and young people communicate, while addressing digital exclusion.





Accountability

13. Welsh Government should reaffirm its commitment to the National Participation Standards for Wales and resource an updated Kitemark process which culminates in an annual good practice and impact report.
14. Local authorities should improve accountability to children and young people by implementing consistent, transparent and measurable feedback mechanisms. These should include clear and accessible communication and demonstrate how children and young people's views have influenced decisions.
15. Welsh Government should require that local authority participation strategies are supported by robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks, with measurable outcomes that clearly demonstrate how children and young people's views have influenced decision-making. This should be supported by annual scrutiny by children and young people and elected members to reinforce accountability and drive improvement.



05

Conclusion

Wales has a strong and well-established foundation for children and young people's participation, underpinned by a comprehensive legal and policy framework and a longstanding commitment to children's rights. Across all local authorities, there is clear evidence of structures, systems and approaches designed to support children and young people to have a voice in decisions that affect their lives.

This report shows that participation is widely recognised, increasingly embedded, and supported by significant professional commitment across Wales. There are strong examples of innovation and leadership, demonstrating what is possible when participation is well resourced, strategically led and integrated into decision-making processes. In these contexts, children and young people are actively shaping services, influencing priorities and contributing to wider civic and democratic life.

However, the findings also highlight a clear and consistent challenge: the gap between participation in principle and participation in practice.

While many children and young people are given opportunities to share their views, fewer experience those opportunities as meaningful, sustained or influential. Across Wales, participation varies significantly in quality, reach and impact; creating what stakeholders have described as a 'postcode lottery' where the extent to which children and young people can influence decisions depends on where they live and how participation is delivered locally.

This gap is reflected across all five principles of The Right Way Framework:

- **Embedding** remains uneven, with participation not yet consistently understood or delivered as a whole-organisation responsibility
- **Equality and non-discrimination** are not fully realised, with persistent gaps in reaching and representing underrepresented groups
- **Empowerment** shows strong awareness of rights, but more limited confidence and understanding needed to exercise them in practice
- **Participation** is well established but not always meaningful or connected to decision-making
- **Accountability** is not consistently visible, with many children and young people unclear about how their views influence outcomes



Taken together, these findings point to a system that is effective at creating opportunities for voice, but less consistent in enabling influence and demonstrating impact.

The evidence also highlights a set of systemic and structural barriers that continue to limit progress. These include resource constraints, short-term funding, competing organisational priorities, and processes that do not easily accommodate meaningful participation. Addressing these challenges will require a more coordinated and sustained approach, supported by stronger expectations at both national and local levels.

The recommendations set out in this report provide a clear route forward. Central to this is the need to strengthen guidance and align statutory duties, including clearer expectations on local authorities to plan, deliver and evidence participation through published participation strategies and appropriate scrutiny. There is also a clear need for sustained, ring-fenced investment, ensuring that participation is not reliant on short-term or project-based funding.

Improving practice will also require action to ensure participation is consistently inclusive, including targeted approaches to engage underrepresented groups and stronger expectations around minimum participation standards. Alongside this, there is a need to build capacity and capability across the workforce, ensuring that all staff understand their role in supporting participation and are equipped with the skills and confidence to deliver it effectively.

Critically, participation must be strengthened as a process of ongoing influence, not one-off engagement. This includes ensuring participation takes place early enough in decision-making to shape outcomes, and that there are clear, accessible systems in place to demonstrate impact. Strengthening accountability mechanisms, including transparent communication and consistent approaches to evidencing how children and young people's views are used, will be essential to building trust and sustaining engagement.

In the context of wider democratic change, including Votes at 16, there is a significant opportunity to strengthen participation as part of a broader vision of children and young people as active citizens. Realising this vision will require ensuring that participation across public services connects meaningfully with children and young people's wider civic and democratic lives so that children and young people's voices carry weight and influence.

Ultimately, delivering on Article 12 of the UNCRC means ensuring that children and young people are not only heard, but are able to shape the decisions that affect their lives.

The task ahead is clear: to move from participation that is present, to participation that is consistently meaningful, inclusive and impactful; supported by stronger systems, clearer expectations and sustained investment, so that every child and young person in Wales can see the difference their voice makes.



APPENDIX –

22 Local Authority Participation Profiles

1. Blaenau Gwent

Blaenau Gwent is a compact former industrial Valleys authority with steep valley landscapes; dense settlements focused on Ebbw Vale, Tredegar and Brynmawr.

- **Population:** approx. **67,356** (mid 2024, all ages)
- **Children 0–15:** approx. **8,324**
- **Deprivation:** Highest proportion in Wales of areas in the most deprived 10% (20% / 9 LSOAs).

Overview

Participation now sits within the Children, Young People & Families Directorate (CYPF) Participation was previously housed within Corporate Services directorate as part of the policy and partnerships team. A move to Education within the CYPF directorate took place in October 2024 to build on existing good practice, enabling the service to have greater access to young people. The service has strong links across all directorates in particular corporate communications and democratic services.

To address wider access to participation, the Engagement Officer (Participation & DoFE) now sits within the CYPF directorate allowing for wider engagement and allowing for greater work with marginalised young people.

Participation Structures

Blaenau Gwent has a dedicated Participation Officer role to lead broad engagement with children and communities. Separate policies and sovereignties remain across the local authority, but there's a push to embed equality and participation as ongoing practices, not one-off efforts. This includes some collaborative work on engagement methods and initiatives with Torfaen through the federated structure.

There are a number of ways for children and young people to participate in Blaenau Gwent. Youth Forums are the main mechanism for youth voice. They are open to all, accessible online and in-person, with no membership required. There is an elected youth mayor and deputy, with service time limits. A Youth Survey has been conducted to set priorities, with 350+ responses via website/ social media. School-based youth workers embed participation in schools.

Children and young people are consulted in several ways such as Borough-wide consultations, school consultations, Children's Commissioner (Monthly Matters), Children's Grand Council sessions, and the Youth Forum.



Embedding Participation and Children's Rights

The Right Way approach is embedded into the Integrated Impact Assessment process within the organisation. This was included to ensure that children and young people are considered and to understand the impact decisions taken may have on their lives.

A Participation Resource Padlet has been created with resources, toolkits, links to key documents, presentations and videos to support staff within their working practice. "The Right Way" is included within this Padlet.

Welsh Government's UNCRC/UNCRPD Children's Rights in the Curriculum module has been agreed as a key area of training across the council. Youth Service staff have been mandated in the first instance to complete the modules, training which is currently under way. Wider implementation across the workforce will take place once uploaded onto the corporate training platform.

Resources are regularly disseminated across the organisation, to support the delivery of UNCRC, within school settings, Youth Service, and Social Services, to help embed a Children's Rights approach.

Good Practice Highlights

- Creative Outreach: Use of digital marketing, social media, and award-winning youth-led films (e.g., anti-bullying film) to reach diverse groups.
- As a region, young people have worked to establish a Children's Charter with the Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent, embedding children's rights into policing and public services. 58 young people involved in the Children's Grand Council session and 8 young people involved in the Regional Youth Forum session have fed into this development.
- Young people play an active role in the recruitment process within the Youth Service by participating in staff interviews. Their involvement ensures that candidates are assessed not only in professional competencies but also on their ability to engage meaningfully with young people. This inclusive approach empowers young people, promotes shared decision-making, and helps appoint staff who are better aligned with the values, needs, and expectations of the young people they will support.
- The Children's Grand Council is a Year 6 programme that brings together pupils from multiple primary schools to participate in a series of structured sessions focused on children's rights, voice, and transition support. Each school selects 2–4 pupils to attend three in-person sessions annually, beginning with a UNCRC quiz and an introduction to the Children's Commissioner, laying the foundation for rights-based learning. The programme has had a meaningful impact by empowering young people to understand and express their rights, fostering new friendships and peer connections across schools, supporting smoother transitions into secondary education, and encouraging active participation and confidence in new environments. This initiative not only strengthens young people's knowledge of their rights but also builds their readiness for the next stage of their educational journey. Between November 2024 and July 2025, five sessions were delivered—four in person and one online catch-up—engaging a total of 277 young people.

Challenges/Barriers

Despite strong practice, Blaenau Gwent identified a number of challenges that affect the sustainability and reach of participation.

- Sustainability of funding – only 0.5FTE Participation role has ringfenced funding. The remaining funding is reliant on external grant sources which are time-limited and come with strings attached.
- Time needed to give young people the opportunity to engage;
- Improving ways in which to involve young people in scrutiny to make it less formal and more accessible.
- Getting young people involved, they are often busy with other things, or in some cases apathetic due to feeling they cannot make a difference or have been involved previously with no feedback and as a result are reluctant to engage
- Sustainable funding can be an issue - without this there is the risk of staff moving roles or even modes of participation being shut down or changed to meet funding criteria.
- Geography and transport are also major challenges – as the local authority is situated over three valleys with patchy public transport.
- Poverty – the local authority is in the top quartile in terms of deprivation and this is a barrier to participation for some children and young people.
- Disconnected Structures: Local partnerships (PSB & RSB) are fragmented and lack clear feedback mechanisms.
- Duplication of work and unclear structures due to too many bodies with overlapping aims.

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2. Bridgend

Bridgend (Penybont ar Ogwr) - is a coastal and valleys authority bridging the M4 corridor and the Llynfi, Garw and Ogmore valleys; mixed urbanrural with key towns Bridgend, Maesteg, Caerau and Porthcawl.

- **Population:** approx. **146,743** (mid 2024, all ages)
- **Children 0–15:** approx. **18,611**
- **Deprivation:** Contains pockets in the most deprived 10% (as do nearly all LAs); deprivation concentrated in parts of South Wales' towns/valleys.

Overview

Participation within Bridgend County Borough Council is underpinned by a strong rights-based youth work tradition, with responsibility for promoting and embedding participation understood as a shared duty across the authority. While all services are expected to support children and young

people's participation, there is dedicated expertise within the Youth Support Service, including Young People's Rights and Participation Workers, who play a key role in supporting wider teams to implement children's rights and participation in practice.

With BCBC, Children services also host a Corporate Parenting & Participation Officer who champions care experienced Children's rights and their voice being heard and oversees the commissioned Specialist Independent Participation Service currently run by TGP Cymru. This service supports the Bridgend Youth Voice Forum for care experienced young people aged 11 to 25 who meet regularly to inform service design, delivery and evaluation along with engaging in regional and national participation activities and the recruitment of social care staff and commissioning process for services received by care experienced children and young people.

Participation activity is supported by close collaboration with third sector youth organisations through Bridgend Youth Matters, alongside links with education, health, and corporate parenting functions. This multi-agency environment enables participation to extend beyond formal forums and into service design, evaluation, scrutiny, and inspection processes.

Participation structures and approaches

Bridgend's core participation structure is the Bridgend Youth Council (BYC), which mirrors the Cabinet model with an elected Youth Mayor, Deputy Youth Mayor and youth cabinet members serving two-year terms to support continuity and meaningful impact. Monthly meetings combine decision-making with workshops, consultations and guest speakers, with flexibility built in to reflect young people's changing commitments.

To address barriers such as transport, geography and the formality of civic spaces, Bridgend has increasingly adopted hybrid and community-based approaches. Meetings rotate between civic venues and youth settings, supported by outreach through the youth bus, helping to engage young people in their local communities. Recruitment takes place through schools, youth clubs, rights-based workshops and third sector partners, with a growing emphasis on presenting the Youth Council as an open forum rather than a fixed or elitist structure. Participation is widened further through the Your Voice digital forum, an annual youth-designed consultation that enables large numbers of children and young people to shape priorities. The most recent survey received around 800 responses, significantly expanding reach and diversity. Findings are shared through a clear "You Said, We Did" approach, helping young people see how their views influence decisions.

Additional participation routes include young people evaluating youth services through the Young Inspectors initiative, contributing to scrutiny meetings, participating in recruitment panels, and leading youth-designed projects such as Period Dignity, a rights-based democracy board game. Dedicated forums also support the participation of care-experienced children and young people.

Embedding Participation and Children's Rights

Children's rights and participation are embedded through regular staff training, practical workshops, and the application of participation standards in youth work practice. Bridgend uses resources from the Children's Commissioner for Wales and partners to strengthen understanding of the UNCRC and participation principles across statutory and third sector services.

Participation is embedded across planning, delivery, and review stages:

- Young people influence strategic planning (e.g. Directorate plans)
- Youth voice informs service evaluation and commissioning
- Feedback loops ensure young people can see how their views have shaped outcomes

The authority recognises that embedding participation is ongoing and requires continual reflection, adaptation, and resourcing.

Good Practice Highlights

- The scale and quality of the Your Voice survey demonstrates strong practice in widening participation. Clear feedback through the “You Said, We Did” approach helps maintain trust and accountability.
- The Young Inspectors model provides meaningful power to young people, with direct influence on youth service improvement and funding decisions.
- Bridgend has embraced youth-led digital engagement (including TikTok), hybrid meetings, video-based feedback, and creative tools such as the Votopia game to make participation accessible and engaging.
- Young people’s involvement in scrutiny meetings and recruitment panels illustrates a shift from consultation to shared decision-making.

Barriers and challenges

Despite strong practice, several challenges were identified:

- Digital engagement barriers, including keeping pace with young people’s communication styles while managing safeguarding and misinformation risks
- Transport and accessibility, particularly for civic-based meetings
- Funding constraints, with participation expectations not always matched by dedicated budgets
- Variation in participation within education, with inconsistent approaches across schools
- Engaging younger and more diverse cohorts, particularly those less confident or less likely to engage through traditional forums

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3. Caerphilly

Caerphilly is a large valleys authority north of Cardiff with linear settlements along valley floors (e.g., Caerffili, Ystrad Mynach, Blackwood); mixed urban/rural uplands.

- **Population:** approx. **176,437** (mid 2024, all ages)
- **Children 0–15:** approx. **23,376**
- **Deprivation:** Contains multiple areas in the most deprived 10% (pattern typical of South Wales Valleys).

Overview

Caerphilly Youth Forum sits within the Youth Service, which sits within the Local Authority's Education and Social Services directorate. All youth service staff and young people operate under the Young People's Participation & Active Involvement in Decision-Making policy, which ensures that all youth service settings embed participative approaches and practice into all service provision, including whole service planning and delivery. Training is given on Participation and rights to youth services, local authority and health boards.

Participation Structures

The Youth Forum has been in place for 25 years and is positively embedded into decision making structures, acting as the county wide mechanism to ensuring the participation of young people in local authority decision making. Young People from schools and youth groups are invited to take part in the forum and prioritise issues, which are carried forward by elected youth forum representatives who sit on the Youth Cabinet, thereby providing leadership roles for young people to represent the views of their peers on the wider youth forum and beyond.

The Youth Service's participative practice provides opportunities for children and young people aged 8 -25 years. The Youth Forum provides opportunities for young people aged 11-25.

Embedding Participation and Children's Rights

The Cabinet Member for Education, also the elected Youth Champion for the Local Authority and the deputy leader, is also present at all youth forum borough wide meetings and has close links with the Youth cabinet and chair team and ensures young people's views inform Local Authority.

The Youth Cabinet and the Youth Forum Project (Action) Group work on behalf of young people to inform LA service planning and policy development through a variety of consultation activity and via an annual coordination of identifying young people issues, which are presented to and discussed at the LA Scrutiny Committees and LA Cabinet.

Good Practice Highlights

- Caerphilly youth forum engages with young people through school councils and youth services and has great collaboration with children's services, this structure is embedded within the authority and has a small team of staff based in the youth service to support the Youth Forum, they also have a Youth Champion who is currently the Deputy Leader.

- There is a clear structure of participation where young people raise issues in schools/ groups each year, these are taken to an annual youth led forum conference, where they are discussed and prioritised and are then the subject of a forum wide online ballot (2472 young took part last year) and the resulting priority issues voted for by young people form the Youth Forums work for the year ahead.
- The forum concentrate on a priority issue identified at the annual conference and create actions and plans to address this for the next year, issues have included Vaping (2024-2025) where great work was done with Healthy Schools, Trading Standards and Public Health Wales to create resources and workshops to raise awareness of the issue for children across the borough. [See here](#)
- This year 2025 – 2026 they have been focussing on school toilets and have held a presentation to education leaders to offer solutions and ideas around improving school toilets (issues include vaping, privacy and the blocking of toilets).
- The Welsh Youth Parliament rep is invited to sit on the Youth Forum and forum members are given a chance to be involved in wider opportunities including: UK Youth Parliament, Young Wales, Children’s Commissioner events, Gwent regional forum, work with the Police and Crime Commissioners office, Public Health Wales young ambassadors and other projects with Cardiff University.
- The forum have worked together to develop a great video created with young people to explain what the forum is and how to get involved – <https://youtu.be/FhS3Sg0ZpQA>

Challenges include:

- Limited funding – the youth forum is reliant on a mix of grant and core finding and has limited capacity to develop further than current structures/activity.
- Representation and engagement are often reliant on professionals in a range of settings; for LA staff to reach young people, this can affect the ability to get an opportunity to reach out to all young people.
- Many young people lack the confidence, self esteem and knowledge required to fully participate. Youth Forum staff provide a lot of support to young people for them to build the skills and confidence needed to participate. This takes time and capacity, meaningful participation can be a lengthy process.
- Geographical challenges – face to face contact works more effectively for developing participation and participative structures and the borough is difficult to travel across as a young person, forum staff must transport young people to meeting locations before work can take place and this requires funding, capacity and often limits delivery capacity.

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4. Cardiff

Cardiff is the capital city; a major urban centre with a coastal/estuarine front (Cardiff Bay) and suburban/rural fringes to the north.

- **Population:** approx. **383,536** (mid 2024, all ages)
- **Children 0–15:** approx. **48,131**
- **Deprivation:** Contains pockets of high deprivation alongside areas of relative affluence; pattern typical of large cities. (Most LAs have at least one area in the top 10%.)

Overview

In Cardiff, responsibility for participation sits primarily within the Education Directorate, led by the Child Friendly Cardiff (CFC) team. The CFC team has strategic oversight of participation and works to embed meaningful engagement with children and young people across all council services, in line with the National Participation Standards and Cardiff's commitment as a UNICEF Child Friendly City.

Participation Structures

Cardiff Youth Council (CYC) is directly supported by the CFC team, which provides dedicated staffing, training, and structured opportunities for young people to shape policy, services, and strategic priorities. Alongside this, individual departments take the lead on participation within their own areas of work. For example: Youth Services engage young people through youth work and outreach programmes. Hubs and Libraries regularly involve children and young people in shaping local services and events. Planning has embedded child-friendly engagement into the Local Development Plan process, with support from CFC. Transport engages young people in consultations on mobility, active travel, and the Road User Payment proposals. Play Services ensure children are consulted on play sufficiency and local opportunities. This distributed model enables departments to lead engagement where they hold subject expertise, while the CFC team ensures consistency, capacity-building, and alignment with children's rights.

Embedding and Children's Rights

The CFC team also facilitates cross-departmental collaboration and provides tools, training, and support to strengthen participatory practice across the authority Children's Services covering children aged 0-25.

CFC – led a Cardiff City Participation Review – In order to show the impact and quality assure the work they have developing as a child friendly city a participation self assessment was sent to every directorate service asking questions such as: Do you have a formal participation policy? How do you feedback? What barriers do you face? How do you ensure you engage underrepresented groups? Do you use the National Standards of Participation? Can you show examples of how young people have influenced changes made to your services.

Good Practice Highlights

Due to the work of CFC the breadth and depth of participation across the county is well established this is evident in the range of work they have done across the Local Authority including supporting a range of services to support participation and a range of support for young people to influence for change including:

- The Economy and Culture scrutiny consulting on the future of Cardiffs parks and outdoor spaces
- Environmental scrutiny and policy committee; influencing a healthier, greener and safer Cardiff
- Influenced play and planning strategy to shape planning guidance for play in Cardiff
- Taken part in LDP workshops to set priorities for their areas to inform the next stage of the LDP and its child friendly version
- Involvement in recruitment; scrutiny sessions and high profile civic events
- Co-production of some active travel research with university academics
- The research team within Cardiff Council can be commissioned by service areas to develop consultation tools and do direct work where required, this partnership with services areas has led to work around consultation with Children and young people to inform the development of high quality Childrens Rights Impact assessments. (CRIA's) and is sometimes supported by CFC Team or research team when requested by service areas and teams
- CFC supports all schools in Cardiff to work towards a Rights Respecting School Award (RRSA) and provide support and training for this, they have developed a Social tool kit for under 11's adapted from a UNICEF toolkit for schools using a local approach for the advocacy toolkit to make it Cardiff centric and then launched this through the RRSA network.

Barriers and challenges:

Despite strong participation structures, Cardiff identified several ongoing challenges:

- Promoting and facilitating meaningful participation across the workforce: many staff lack time, training, or confidence to engage meaningfully with children and young people. Participation is sometimes seen as an 'extra' rather than a core responsibility, this can lead to inconsistent practice across departments with some having well established approaches, while others are still developing theirs.
- Limited reach and representation: Engagement often involves older, more confident young people. Barriers remain to including younger children, disabled children, and those from marginalised or underrepresented groups.
- Weak feedback and visibility of impact: Children and young people do not always hear how their views influenced decisions, a lack of clear consistent impact reporting reduces trust and limits future engagement.



- **Structural and cultural challenges:** Participation is not always built into service timelines or decision-making processes. Internal systems and competing priorities can limit responsiveness to children's views.
- **Resource and funding constraints:** The central CFC team provides leadership, but other departments often lack dedicated time or funding for participation work. This limits the scale and depth of engagement activity.
- **The reporting back to Welsh Government** means a lot of paperwork is done for different work/funding streams, it would be easier if they could just look at the overall plan and not be required to unpick everything.
- **Cardiff is hugely diverse and changing in its nature** e.g. asylum seekers influx in schools and then move areas and we need to ensure we don't miss out on engaging with these new communities – the mobility across the city is in a constant state of flux and change.
- **Homelessness crisis** has an impact on children and young people and reducing the stability of which school children attend – we hope the development of the early help hubs across the city will help with this.

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5. Carmarthenshire

Carmarthenshire (Sir Gâr) is a large, predominantly rural county with key towns (Llanelli, Carmarthen, Ammanford) and extensive agricultural/coastal areas.

- **Population:** approx. **190,083** (mid 2024, all ages)
- **Children 0–15:** approx. **23,662**
- **Deprivation:** Contains some areas in the most deprived 10%, though not among the highest proportion LAs.

Overview

Participation within Carmarthenshire County Council is largely coordinated through youth services, with a clear commitment to involving children and young people in decision-making processes that affect their lives. Participation activity is strongest within youth work settings and youth council structures, supported by dedicated officers. However, the authority recognises that participation is not yet consistently embedded across all council services and that further cultural change is needed to support shared ownership of participation.

Participation structures and approaches

Carmarthenshire's core participation structure is its Youth Council, which provides a forum for children and young people to raise issues, influence priorities, and engage with decision-makers. Participation activity also takes place through youth groups, targeted engagement work, and partnership activity with third sector organisations.

Participation officers play a key role in supporting engagement activity and advising services on how to involve children and young people meaningfully. However, it was acknowledged that participation is sometimes perceived as a specialist function, rather than a shared responsibility across all services working with children and young people.

Efforts have been made to support inclusive participation, but face-to-face engagement can be limited by geography, transport availability, and staffing capacity, particularly in more rural areas.

Embedding participation and children's rights

The authority recognises that embedding participation consistently across services remains a work in progress. While youth services demonstrate strong rights-based practice, there is a need to raise awareness across wider council teams so that participation is not seen as the sole responsibility of participation officers.

A key challenge identified was limited awareness among children and young people themselves. Many are not fully aware of their rights or of the opportunities available to participate in decision-making. This highlights the importance of stronger communication, education, and visibility of participation opportunities across the county.

Capacity within other key services also affects the extent to which participation can be embedded consistently, particularly where teams face competing priorities or resource pressures.

Good practice/highlights

Carmarthenshire demonstrates commitment to participation through its youth council and youth work provision, with clear recognition of the importance of young people's voices in shaping services.

The authority has shown willingness to engage at regional and national levels, with youth leads seeking representation on youth and participation boards across Wales. There is also evidence of reflective practice, with officers openly identifying gaps and areas where participation could be strengthened.

Barriers and challenges

Several interconnected challenges were identified:

- Limited staff capacity, particularly within youth services, which affects the ability to expand participation activity
- Transport and geography, which create barriers to face-to-face engagement across a large rural county
- Cultural perceptions, where participation is sometimes viewed as a specialist task rather than a shared responsibility across services
- Low awareness among children and young people of their rights and participation opportunities

- Inconsistent regional representation, with youth partnership leads not consistently involved in regional or public boards
- Capacity constraints within other council services further impact the ability to embed participation more widely.

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6. Ceredigion

Ceredigion is a sparsely populated rural and coastal authority (Cardigan Bay), with university presence in Aberystwyth and Lampeter; dispersed settlements.

- **Population:** approx. **73,050** (mid 2024, all ages)
- **Children 0–15:** approx. **7,415**
- **Deprivation:** Only one area in the most deprived 10% in Wales (low count by Welsh standards).

Participation Structures and Approaches

Children and Young People's Participation is embedded in practice across the Local Authority. Ceredigion Youth Service employ a Senior Participation Officer (0.8) whose remit focuses on young people's participation. The SPO sits within Ceredigion Youth Service, Porth Cymorth Cynnar (Early Help). Physical activity and play participation is led by the Wellbeing Centres Service which is also part of Porth Cymorth Cynnar. The responsibility for participation extends to Schools Services in terms of promoting and establishing pupil voice in Primary and Secondary Schools, and Pupil Referral Units.

Furthermore, the participation of care experienced children and young people is facilitated by Porth Cynnal (Social Care) which includes the commissioning of a third sector partner (TGP) who provide individual advocacy and group-based consultation and engagement on our behalf. All young people are offered the opportunity to have an advocate help represent their views at Child Protection Conferences, Child Looked After Reviews and any issue-based concern.

Embedding Participation and Children's Rights

The nature in which children's participation is embedded into planning, delivery and reviewing services differs across the organisation, with firm evidence of good practice, some examples of which are illustrated here:

In 2017 Ceredigion County Council Elected Members agreed to 'take account' of UNCRC and adopt the National Participation Standards. Children and Young People's Rights and Participation are firmly included and reviewed as part of Ceredigion's Engagement and Participation Policy.

Ceredigion's Integrated Impact Assessment Tool incorporates the principles of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, the Equality Act 2010, the Welsh Language Measure 2011 and Risk Management in order to inform effective decision making and ensuring compliance with respective legislation. The impact of decision making on children and young people is considered as part of this statutory requirement.

Ceredigion Youth Council was established in 2015 and plays a pivotal role in supporting the engagement and participation of young people across the Local Authority, and wider public bodies. The Youth Council is firmly embedded in the wider democratic structure of Ceredigion County Council, included in its constitution. Minutes from all Youth Council meetings are presented to the Learning Communities Scrutiny Committee and to Cabinet. The Cabinet Member for Schools Service and Lifelong Learning and Skills is a strong advocate for CYP voice and sits on the Youth Council each year. In addition, representatives of the Youth Council annually present to all Councillors on their work and the priorities.

Since being established in 2015, the Ceredigion Youth Council has had support from Senior Management and Councillors. The Youth Council play an integral role in the consultation, review and creation of various policy areas and services such as the School Nursing Service, Careers 360 platform and the review of post-16 education.

Events such as the Rhoi dy Farn Campaign and the Pawb a'i Farn debate are examples of how young people's views shape future services and priorities. Furthermore, results from the annual Rhoi dy Farn campaign provides a foundation for grant planning and commissioning, as can be evidenced in the recent update of Ceredigion's Youth Work Commissioning Framework.

The strategic planning of Physical Activity programmes is driven by results of the Sport Wales School Sport Survey with 2,762 responses from Ceredigion achieved in 2022. Activities are influenced by pupil voice through the Young Ambassador programme and through evaluation of current programmes.

Ceredigion County Council recognises and supports every child's right to play, aligning with Welsh Government's legislation. Ceredigion County Council aims to encourage and support communities in creating and developing environments where children and young people can engage in play and where adults recognise and promote the value of play. The Play Sufficiency Assessment (PSA) 2025 continues Ceredigion's commitment by building on the work undertaken in 2022. This report provides a comprehensive overview of play opportunities across the county and outlines actionable steps to further embed play into Ceredigion's culture and communities.

Participation is embedded in school services through Learner Voice opportunities e.g. Wellbeing Ambassadors e.g. meet termly with School Services to discuss and plan activities to raise awareness of national days/weeks in schools such as Children's Mental Health Week, Anti-Bullying Week, Empathy Festival etc.

The SHRN survey is completed by all secondary schools, and a growing number of primary schools. This data is analysed to ensure relevant support is available. School services incorporate learner voice sessions into school visits, where pupils have an opportunity to provide feedback and insight into their school community.

Ceredigion commissions TGP (Safe Stars) to work with looked after children. They organise group sessions 4 times a year in order to gather the views of care experienced children, providing feedback independently on their social worker, their experiences and views on being looked after.

Ceredigion's Childcare Unit attend CREY Network meetings and disseminate information to the Childcare sector. This includes information about the Pledge for Babies in Wales, which has been developed by CREYN, and highlights the perspective of the baby, focusing on their rights within the first 1000 days.

Good Practice/Highlights

- Ceredigion Youth Council is a good practice example of an established and valued County-wide platform in which key decisions are made, that influence priority areas. This is illustrated within Estyn's report on Education Services in Ceredigion County Council in 2024.
- Ceredigion's Period Dignity Sub-Group demonstrates a platform in which young people have fully shaped local provision, including grant profiling and the creation of guidance which is now used across the region.
- Ceredigion's Youth Forum (panel dewis) is responsible for influencing service delivery, and the awarding and evaluation of various small grant schemes.
- Aberystwyth Community Ambassadors Group is supported to organise and deliver various community-based projects, awareness activities and events locally, all in aid of supporting the local community. This includes recent awareness projects around; youth homelessness, young carers and grief and bereavement.
- The Play for All programme in Ceredigion is a strong example of inclusive and effective practice in youth leadership and physical activity promotion. While all schools in the county benefit from the support of Young Ambassadors who pro-actively promote and deliver opportunities to get their peers physically active, Play for All provides a dedicated ambassador leadership pathway for young people with learning disabilities.
- Online participation sessions were held during 2022 to input into the Ceredigion Local Wellbeing Plan 2023-2028.
- Ceredigion have developed a bespoke course open to all LA staff which includes raising awareness around UNCRC and the Future Generations Act, this will be run from September.
- "Porth Cymorth Cynnar is Ceredigion's Early Help and Prevention Service for children, families and adults, and provides critical support to the vulnerable families".
- Schools use a safe zone approach in schools, a system which they credit with having no permanent exclusion in any school in the last 10 years. They use a system called Hafan which is a safe space for CYP and there are Youth Workers in schools where their main focus is to identify the most vulnerable CYP.

Barriers and Challenges

Ceredigion has identified a number of challenges that affect the sustainability and reach of participation:

- Young people friendly information.
- Rurality and transportation.
- Rural poverty
- Language, Welsh speakers or resources not always being available.
- Engaging with individuals/groups from minority backgrounds.

- Social Care, some children are placed outside of Ceredigion
- Early Years/Childcare is insufficient in some pockets of the County which may hinder meaningful access to participation for younger children

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7. Conwy

Conwy is a mixed coastal and urban local authority, encompassing areas such as Llandudno and Colwyn Bay, with a predominantly rural upland hinterland including the Conwy Valley and the foothills of Eryri.

- **Population:** approx. **114,410** (mid 2024, all ages)
- **Children 0–15:** approx. **13,269**
- **Deprivation:** Conwy includes some areas within the most deprived 10% nationally, although it does not have one of the highest overall proportions of deprivation among Welsh local authorities.

Overview

The Conwy Youth, Engagement and Belonging Service holds responsibility for participation within Conwy County Borough Council. This work is currently supported by one part time Participation Officer and is led by the Strategic Manager of the Service. The participation agenda benefits from clear senior management and elected member support.

Children’s participation in decision making is integral to Conwy’s governance approach. Youth Council representation is embedded across scrutiny committees to ensure that the voices of children and young people are consistently heard and considered within democratic processes.

Participation Structures

Conwy has three core participation workstreams that support the voices of children and young people:

1. Youth Council – for young people aged 11–25
2. Power Voices – a group for secondary aged looked after children
3. Loud Voices – a group for primary aged looked after children

The Loud Voices and Power Voices groups are led by Social Care. The local authority has recognised the importance of better aligning these groups, while ensuring that the individual needs and experiences of children and young people remain central.

The Youth Council provides a structured platform for young people aged 11–25 to influence decision making and shape services.

In parallel, Conwy has undertaken a comprehensive review of how services currently capture the voices of children under the age of 11. This work has identified strengths, gaps, and opportunities for improvement, ensuring that younger children are meaningfully engaged in shaping the support they



receive. Findings from this review will inform future practice and help embed inclusive participation across all age groups.

The local authority has already supported schools to embed pupil voice and is now seeking to strengthen links between primary school councils and the Local Authority Youth Council. This approach will mirror the Youth Council structure, with the key distinction that it will actively include primary aged children, ensuring their perspectives are captured within decision making processes.

Embedding Participation and Children's Rights

Children's participation is embedded within Conwy's governance arrangements. Youth Council representation on scrutiny committees was initially piloted within Social Care and Education. Following positive outcomes, this model is now being embedded across all scrutiny committees to ensure children and young people's voices are consistently heard.

Alongside this, areas of good practice have been identified where children's views are successfully captured during planning, delivery, and review processes. Building on this foundation, work is underway with relevant services to strengthen approaches to engaging children under 11, ensuring their perspectives meaningfully inform service development and evaluation.

Good Practice Highlights

- **Welsh Youth Parliament Partnership:** Conwy Youth Service is a formal partner of the Welsh Youth Parliament, providing young people with opportunities to influence policy at a national level. One young person was elected to represent Conwy Youth Service directly, with two additional young people elected through constituency campaigns. This reflects the strength of local youth leadership, democratic engagement, and the effectiveness of Conwy's youth participation and leadership development approach.
- **Influencing National Youth Work Policy:** Members of the Youth Council engaged directly with the Strategic Manager of the Youth, Engagement and Belonging Service to discuss the proposed statutory Youth Work Framework for Wales. This enabled young people to influence national policy at an early stage.
- **Positive Participation Experience:** Youth Council members reported feeling heard and valued through this engagement. Open dialogue and clear explanations strengthened trust and transparency, helping young people to understand how policy decisions affect them now and in the future.
- **Corporate Pledge Approach:** Conwy operates a Corporate Pledge requiring each service to report annually on safeguarding commitments and identify barriers to effective practice. Services then seek Youth Council feedback on proposed actions, ensuring young people's voices inform decision making. Building on this, Conwy is exploring the development of a broader corporate participation pledge across all services.
- **Strategic Review of Participation:** A formal review of participation practice has been completed, identifying priority areas to strengthen and embed participation across services. One key priority is increasing capacity within the Youth Participation Team to meet growing demand and ensure consistent engagement.



- **Raising Awareness in Education:** Youth Council representatives have developed plans to deliver a conference for headteachers and governors to raise awareness of the Youth Council's role. In addition, the local authority has invested in a Youth Council promotional video to enhance visibility and encourage wider engagement.

Challenges and Barriers

- **Resource Constraints:** There is a strong commitment to youth participation; however, budget pressures and a predominantly older demographic limit what can be delivered.
- **Engagement with Ethnic Communities:** While there has been previous collaboration with EYST, there is currently no structured voluntary provision for ethnic minority communities. Developing this area has been identified as a priority.
- **Limited Staffing Capacity:** Participation is currently supported by a single part-time Participation Officer working 12 hours per week. This limits the capacity for coordination and facilitation. The authority is actively exploring options to strengthen capacity.
- **Structural and Practical Barriers:** There is a need to strengthen formal mechanisms to ensure children's voices are consistently heard and acted upon. The timing and location of meetings, such as scrutiny committees, can unintentionally exclude children due to school commitments, transport, or cost barriers.
- **Support Mechanisms:** Funding pressures mean that support mechanisms for young people are not always consistent or easily accessible. Strengthening this area is essential to improving access and outcomes.
- **Psychological and Social Barriers:** Some young people experience low confidence or anxiety when participating in formal settings. Fear of judgement, lack of trust, and the use of complex or age inappropriate language can discourage engagement. Without further investment, these barriers are likely to persist.
- **A lack of clear feedback loops** has also been identified. When young people do not see how their input has influenced decisions, confidence and trust in the process are undermined. Youth Council representatives have highlighted that this can make participation feel tokenistic.

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8. Denbighshire

Denbighshire is a county with coastal towns (Rhyl, Prestatyn) with rural interior; mixed tourism, service, and agricultural economy.

- **Population:** approx. **97,156** (mid 2024, all ages)
- **Children 0–15:** approx. 12,334
- Percentage of pupils with additional learning needs (**ALN**) or special educational needs (**SEN**) in maintained schools, (Jan 2025): **6.0%**
- At least one highly deprived LSOA.

Overview

Participation within Denbighshire County Council is led by the Youth Service and is embedded within a broader Youth and Community Resilience model. Following a service restructure in April 2025, youth work now sits alongside housing, community development and resilience functions, reflecting a deliberate philosophy of seeing young people as active citizens within their communities.

The Youth and Community Resilience Team operates within Housing and Communities, with a strong emphasis on partnership, prevention and strengths-based approaches. Participation is positioned as part of mainstream service delivery rather than a stand-alone function, supported by a senior management lead for participation and a dedicated Participation Management post with the intention to grow this area of the service to reflect a more proportionate reflection of the 'participation' pillar of youth work and to support young people's legal rights. The service covers young people aged 11–25, with growing connections into corporate planning, scrutiny processes and community-based initiatives.

Participation structures and approaches

Denbighshire has recently relaunched its Youth Voice programme, which is gaining momentum across the county. The Youth Council sits within the Youth and Community Resilience Team and is increasingly connected to scrutiny and corporate planning processes.

Hybrid meetings have significantly improved accessibility in a large rural authority. Previously, participation relied heavily on physical travel, with youth workers transporting young people across the county. The reintroduction of hybrid working has reduced geographical barriers and increased engagement.

The Council has also adopted creative digital approaches to participation. A youth-led podcast, "What's Strong, Not Wrong", enables young people to discuss topics such as wellbeing, body image and community identity. This format has been particularly effective in engaging those who may lack confidence to speak in formal meetings, while also building digital and leadership skills.

Young people are increasingly involved in shaping funding proposals and community projects. For example, young people designed and developed a pump track proposal in Upper Denbigh, undertaking consultation and community asset mapping before seeking funding. Participation is also feeding into structured governance tools, including Wellbeing and Health Impact Assessments, ensuring youth voice informs key strategic decisions.

Embedding participation and children's rights

Participation is embedded across open-access youth provision, with co-production described as central to service delivery. The restructure has strengthened accountability and strategic oversight, ensuring participation aligns with the Council's corporate pledge to bring the authority "closer to communities". The Principal Manager for the Youth Service also leads on the Closer to Communities workstream for the authority.

The Youth Service is aiming to make strong connections to scrutiny processes, and there are actions within the corporate plan (and more notably the work of the Well Run, High Performing Council theme within the plan) to widen youth involvement in decision-making. Participation is therefore moving beyond consultation towards greater integration within governance structures.

The Council is also part of a growing North Wales participation network, collaborating with neighbouring authorities to strengthen regional youth leadership and shared learning. While young people are involved in shaping services and projects, the authority acknowledges that formalised feedback mechanisms could be further strengthened as the youth voice strand continues to develop.

Good Practice

Denbighshire's integration of youth work within a Community Resilience model offers a distinctive approach to embedding participation within wider community systems.

The use of creative digital tools, including youth-led podcasts, demonstrates innovation in engaging young people who may not respond to traditional surveys or meetings. Hybrid delivery has significantly reduced rural transport barriers, improving accessibility across the county.

Youth involvement in designing community infrastructure projects and contributing to Wellbeing and Health Impact Assessments reflects meaningful influence on tangible local outcomes. The emerging North Wales regional participation collaboration also provides a strong foundation for shared learning and collective improvement.

Barriers and challenges

Denbighshire identified several ongoing challenges:

- Power imbalance between young people and adults, which can limit meaningful influence in decision-making
- Geographical and transport barriers, particularly in rural areas
- Capacity and time pressures, affecting the ability to scale participation activity
- Inconsistent understanding of national participation frameworks across local authorities
- The pace and consistency of Welsh Government guidance, which can impact local implementation timelines
- The Council noted that addressing power imbalance requires cultural change as well as structural mechanisms, and that adult attitudes and behaviours can influence the quality of participation.

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9. Flintshire County Council

Flintshire (Sir y Fflint) is a Northeast Wales authority with a strong crossborder link to Cheshire and Merseyside; mix of industrial towns (e.g. Deeside) and rural areas.

- **Population:** approx. **155,812** (mid 2024, all ages)
- **Children 0-15:** approx. **19,745**
- **Deprivation:** Contains some areas in the most deprived 10%, consistent with the national pattern

Overview

Participation within Flintshire County Council is led by the Youth Service and embedded across the Education & Youth portfolio and Children's Services. Responsibility for participation is understood as shared, with different teams leading engagement for different age groups and cohorts, including play, school-aged children, justice-involved young people, and care-experienced children.

Flintshire has developed a coordinated approach to participation that brings together statutory services, schools, and community settings. This is supported by strong partnership working and a clear commitment to ensuring children and young people's voices inform policy development, service design, and local decision-making.

Participation structures

Flintshire's participation framework spans ages 0–25, with tailored approaches for different stages of childhood and adolescence. Core structures include Youth Council and School Councils, alongside specialist participation routes through Youth Service, Play Development, Health Promoting Schools, Youth Justice Services, and Children's Services forums.

A key feature of Flintshire's approach is the "Young Flintshire" model, which brings together representatives from the Youth Council, School Councils, Associate Pupil Governors, special schools, PRUs, and mainstream secondary schools. This integrated forum allows young people to collaborate across education and youth settings and to collectively engage with senior decision-makers.

Participation is also supported through annual youth-led consultations, particularly the "3 Issues Consultation", which invites all young people aged 11–18 to identify the issues that matter most to them, their families, and their communities. The findings form the evidence base for Flintshire's youth priorities and inform council planning and service delivery.

Flintshire is also preparing to launch an overarching Belonging Strategy (planned for Autumn 2026), which aims to strengthen consistency and expectations for participation across planning, delivery, and review processes within the Education & Youth portfolio.

Embedding participation and children's rights

Children's participation is embedded through a combination of strategic frameworks, consultation mechanisms, and practice-based engagement. Participation informs council planning, funding priorities, place-making initiatives, and regeneration projects, with young people engaged through both online and face-to-face methods.

Children and young people have been actively involved in shaping key policies and strategies, including the Corporate Parenting Charter: A Promise for Wales, the Climate Change Strategy, School Food and Drink Provision, and the forthcoming Belonging Strategy.

Feedback and accountability are supported through regular updates at Youth Council and Young Flintshire meetings, email communications, and school channels. While formal feedback mechanisms continue to develop, many services also rely on visible, practical changes to demonstrate how children's views have shaped provision, particularly within play and youth services.

Good practice/highlights

Flintshire demonstrates strong practice in system-wide collaboration, with participation embedded across education, youth work, social care, justice, and community services.

The Young Flintshire model stands out as an effective way of joining up youth voice across schools and youth services, enabling collaboration between elected pupil representatives and youth council members.

The 3 Issues Consultation provides a clear, youth-led mechanism for gathering views at scale and translating them into council priorities. Flintshire has also demonstrated strong practice in involving justice-involved young people, achieving the highest youth response rate regionally under the Serious Violence Duty and ensuring their views shaped the North Wales strategy.

Additional examples of effective participation include:

- Youth involvement in co-developing the Corporate Parenting Charter
- Young people shaping the Belonging Strategy, Climate Change Strategy, and school food provision
- An annual schools Pride celebration originating from learner-led discussions
- Child-led practice within Play Development services, where feedback directly shapes provision
- We are currently doing a big project across all Primary schools Play Development are leading on Engaging younger children: Participation for children aged 5–11 is recognised as an area of focus to ensure inclusion across all age groups.

Barriers and challenges

Despite strong participation structures, Flintshire identified several ongoing challenges:

- Awareness and confidence: Some young people are unaware that they have a right to participate or underestimate the value of their voice. Anxiety and low confidence can also limit engagement.
- Accessibility: Transport, cost, location of meetings, and timing continue to affect access to formal participation opportunities.
- Justice-involved children: Engagement within Youth Justice can be time-intensive, and feedback can be difficult to secure depending on timing, relationships, and safeguarding considerations.

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10. Gwynedd

Gwynedd is a large rural and coastal authority covering Snowdonia/Eryri and Llŷn Peninsula; significant Welsh speaking population and university presence.

- **Population:** approx. **119,173** (mid 2024, all ages)
- **Children 0–15:** approx. **13,877**
- **Deprivation:** Contains isolated pockets of deprivation but not among the highest proportion LAs.

Overview

Gwynedd Council have appointed a Communication and Engagement Coordinator to lead a new model of participation. This post currently works with young people aged 11 to 25.

Participation Structures

Llais Ni, the Youth Forum of the Youth Service, meets with the Service Manager every quarter, working together on three key priorities.

The Youth Service has worked with several schools and partners to conduct questionnaires, with the data being shared with the forum. The priorities were chosen by young people themselves - one of these is bullying. Llais Ni is also collaborating with the Service Manager to develop a new strategy for the next three years.

Llais Ni Schools Youth Forums have just completed elections across the county and have met with the Head of Education, who will meet with the schools forum every quarter. This forum is currently working on a consultation plan.

In order to strengthen inclusion, a Services Forum is currently being developed, so that all services or organizations that work with young people have the same opportunities to participate and express an opinion.

From the three forums noted above, one will form Gwynedd Council Forum, with representation from different groups across the county, Participation in action. The youth forum will meet every quarter and will share their thoughts and feedback with senior leaders.

Embedding Participation and Childrens Rights

Gwynedd is developing training courses on children's rights. They have also received training from the Children's Commissioner's Office to explore rights and embed a rights-based approach.

A number of promotional and awareness-raising sessions have been held to promote Gwynedd's new participation model, including, for example, the equality core group. CG senior managers, as well as advisers, support this model.

Services including schools, social services and youth services operate in accordance with the principles of Youth Work practice, which includes participation and supports models including school councils, youth forum and ensuring we listen to the voice of the young person.

Information is shared with young people as widely as possible, with the forums being youth-led and young people holding formal roles, including Communications Officer, through the groups' election processes. Monthly updates are provided through the Youth Service's social media channels, with information also due to be made available on the website. The work is led and shaped by young people themselves, reflecting an ethos of "you said, we worked together", which aims to ensure that young people can see how their views and contributions influence priorities, activities and decision-making.

Good Practice Highlights

- Work has been undertaken with pupils in schools to inform the development of the new forum, including engagement with Year 10 and 11 learners to better understand their experiences of school. Providing opportunities for young people to share their views directly has been valuable in shaping both provision and decision-making. Young people have also been involved in recruitment processes, including participation in interviews for senior posts, which has been seen as contributing to more informed decisions.
- The views of young people are gathered through the Youth Service and a range of wider engagement activities. This includes work with children and young people who are ill or disabled, as well as those experiencing homelessness, across different geographical areas.
- Over the past two years, there has been significant development within autism services, with children and young people playing a central role in the creation of the Niwro app.
- Partnership work has also taken place with Action for Children, carers and young carers to develop the App AIDI app. This involved exploring the factors that make a positive difference in young carers' lives, alongside the challenges associated with caring responsibilities. As part of this work, a Young Carers ID Card has been introduced and promoted, enabling young carers to communicate additional support needs within educational settings.
- The Youth Service adopts a responsive approach that is led by the views and priorities of young people. For example, where young people have identified mental health as a priority, wellbeing-focused forums have been developed in response. Feedback from young people has also highlighted the importance of informal opportunities to meet, socialise and spend time in a safe environment, leading services to adapt their offer accordingly.
- Future work will be guided by the Lundy Model of Participation, with ongoing review and evaluation forming an integral part of the approach. This will include direct feedback from young people on services and provision. While not all requests can necessarily be implemented, providing clear explanations and demonstrating how views have been considered is regarded as an important aspect of meaningful participation.
- The service is an active member of the All Wales Participation Workers Network and collaborates with participation officers across North Wales, particularly through regional networks. It is also involved in national participation initiatives, including engagement in the Taith project and planned participation in a visit to Croatia as part of this programme.

Challenges/Barriers

- Work has been mapped across a range of activities and a number of barriers have been identified. In response, a new participation model is being implemented, designed to provide a sustainable and inclusive approach to engaging with children and young people.
- Challenges have included limitations in capacity and funding. However, efforts have been made to identify solutions and develop a participation model that is both sustainable and capable of supporting meaningful engagement over the longer term.
- A key challenge has been ensuring that the voices of as many groups of children and



young people as possible are heard. A wide range of organisations and groups are already undertaking valuable engagement work, including well-established third sector organisations such as Gisda. The challenge is less about a lack of activity and more about coordinating these efforts effectively, bringing information together, and avoiding siloed approaches.

- It was noted that the role of the Corporate Panel within the overall participation structure may require further consideration as arrangements continue to develop.
- Engagement with young people aged 11 to 25 presents its own challenges. While participation from younger age groups, particularly those aged 11 to 16, is generally strong, there has been more limited engagement from older young people.
- The geographical nature of Gwynedd can also create barriers to participation. Bringing young people together from across the county can be difficult, and although digital technology provides opportunities for engagement, it is not always seen as a full substitute for face-to-face interaction.
- It was noted that obtaining consistent information from schools can sometimes be challenging, which may affect the completeness of the overall picture available at local authority level. A range of factors may influence schools' approaches to collecting and sharing information, including competing priorities and considerations around data handling and reporting requirements. While many schools engage positively, variations in participation can make it more difficult to identify trends, understand experiences consistently across settings, and target support where it may be needed.

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11. Anglesey

Isle of Anglesey (Ynys Môn) is an Island authority with a coastal and rural profile; key towns include Holyhead and Llangefni.

- **Population:** approx. **69,291** (mid 2024, all ages)
- **Children 0–15:** approx. **8,712**
- **Deprivation:** Contains a small number of areas in the most deprived 10%, consistent with national spread (all but one LA have at least one).

Overview

The whole authority has a role to play in this area but the Senior Health, Wellbeing and Safeguarding Manager within the Learning Service is currently leading this work.

The Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Service Manager is responsible for ensuring that children in care and the children on the child protection register are offered advocacy as part of the service to ensure that her voice and opinion are included in care/child protection plans etc. The voice of our children in care is also included in our corporate parent panel arrangements. This includes children with disabilities.

Within the Youth Service - Participation is one of the areas of work within the framework of the Youth Service and although the voice and opinion of young people are included, following an internal audit/restructuring it is an area that is being developed, which includes looking at employing young people in the context of apprenticeships.

Participation Structures

A lot of work has taken place to try to embed children's participation in our work but Anglesey are currently on a journey to strengthen this work. There are concrete examples since the Pandemic of the re-establishment of the Anglesey Children and Young People's Forum (covering ages 8-18) all working with e.g. Medrwn Môn on projects that encourage children and young people to apply for grants for its local community.

Each year in the new term schools elect a School Council, which then leads to the establishment of a Catchment Area Council. Then the Anglesey Children and Young People's Forum is established. This supports children and young people aged 6 – 18.

There are many participation opportunities on the island with the Young Farmers, Urdd, Môn Actif, Youth Service, Medrwn Môn etc.

Youth work provision is now 52 week provision. When it used to sit in education, it was term time. When this moved to children's services – changed it to 52 week provision and there is a youth worker in every high school.

From the perspective of the Youth Service, their views are collected as part of any consultation / change.

The children and families service intends to have children in care as part of a recruitment panel for social workers in the near future.

Embedding Participation and Children's Rights

Barnardo's is delivering training on rights and participation which staff are being encouraged to attend. Within social care the team for children and families intend to hold training sessions for our children in care in order to create a participation panel and social services staff have received Trauma Informed training which ensures that we listen to the voice of the children and young people.

The pupils who are on our Anglesey Children and Young People's Forum have been part of discussions over the past few years relating to the following; council budget consultation, play consultation, equality strategy consultation.

School councils create opportunities in order to gather the opinions and experiences of children and young people with some having been part of the interview to appoint a new Headteacher. There are youth workers in every high school.

Within the youth clubs young people steer the club's program for each season and have important input or the clubs will not succeed.

Also with the Summer projects offered by the department there is the input of young people, staff have asked what they would like to participate in / develop new skills and create a program for the Summer with young people.

Opportunities to gather the views and experiences of children and young people are shared with schools as they arise. Schools are also encouraged to participate in wider research and consultation activities, including initiatives such as school sport questionnaires and the School Health Research Network (SHRN) survey, in order to strengthen understanding of young people's perspectives and experiences.

Good Practice Highlights

- The Children and Young People's Forum have been part of a consultation on the budget as well as being part of draft Policies etc.
- Childrens Regional Partnership Board set up 3 years ago
- The Youth Service manager is a Thinking Forward project manager in partnership with Barnardo's, CAMHS and the Gwynedd Youth Service. The project is with young leaders across the two counties who collaborate with other young people to collect their voice and opinions and different items. One example - a project at David Hughes High School - young leaders developing an anti-bullying policy with young people within the School and this policy will be developed within the School September 2025.
- School Councils have been part of the recruitment process for a New Head.
- Good work has taken place to tackle the worrying situation of "vapes" in Secondary Schools. A question and answer session had been set up in the Secondary Schools as well as a questionnaire on a football line in which almost 1000 pupils took part.
- Menter Môn was described as undertaking excellent work in this area. The participation structure has recently been redesigned, with School Councils organised through the Island's four catchment areas, each with its own council. These feed into a wider Children and Young People's Forum, which meets four times a year.
- Youth services have many experienced staff – 800 children taking part in that at any given time; we can tap into that at any time, they have great engagement with Community focused schools and healthy schools.
- Caffi coffi – worked with local business to open up later as a youth hub, in response to young people in Holyhead saying they didn't have anything to do. Caffi offers free Wifi. Trauma informed work enabled us to design something specific for them. Used Share Prosperity Fund to help.
- As corporate parents there is a corporate parenting panel which invite young people to share their experiences with panel as opposed to having them sit on an inaccessible panel. They offer a six week placement for young people who have experience of care settings. Seven young people came this year and five are now in employment.
- Youth group set up to remove stigma after Covid for LGBTQ+ - safe space for them. Really popular spaces in schools.
- Came up with our own operating model to support the traveller community that passes through the island, usually over the summer.

Challenges/Barriers

- Due to re-election each year of school council reps this is an annual challenge that takes time to establish.
- Lack of capacity can be a challenge as this work is not a specific focus of one individual's work.
- Despite there being many participation opportunities on the island with the Young Farmers, Urdd, Môn Actif, Youth Service, Medrwn Môn etc. creating opportunities there is not enough resources to work together at times.
- Home education – concerns were raised regarding home education arrangements, with the view expressed that current statutory processes are not fit for purpose. It was suggested that a more robust approach, including direct engagement with every child through visits involving education and social care professionals, should be considered.

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12. Merthyr Tydfil

One of Wales' smallest LAs; a Valleys authority with steep valley geography and concentrated urban settlement in Merthyr.

- **Population:** approx. **58,593** (mid 2024, all ages)
- **Children 0–15:** approx. **7,982**
- **Deprivation:** Among Wales' more deprived areas; multiple LSOAs fall within the most deprived 10%. (South Wales Valleys pattern.)

Overview

Local Authority funding for participation for the 11–25-year-old age group is provided to the Youth Service which commissions a local third sector organisation, Safer Merthyr Tydfil. Through this approach the local authority provides young people with the opportunity to have their independent voice heard through the youth-led Merthyr Tydfil Borough Wide Youth Forum (MTBWYF), alongside the office of Youth Mayor and Deputy Youth Mayor and the Youth Cabinet. This approach has enabled young people to engage in the decision-making process on their terms, to speak independently and challenge the local authority where they deem appropriate. It also empowers young people to set their own agenda annually in the development of their work program.

Participation Structures

Council departments and external partners are encouraged to work with the Merthyr Tydfil Borough Wide Youth Forum. However, this does not remove the responsibility for all service areas to ensure they take forward participation and coproduction across their own service priorities in line with the council's Participation Strategy.

Children and young people are engaged directly through young person-led projects, online questionnaires, focus groups in schools, youth clubs and the community. Also views are gathered directly from the Youth Cabinet/ MTBWYF, school councils. Public consultations are undertaken within town centres on key council items such as the budget setting.

The membership of the Merthyr Tydfil Borough Wide Youth Forum (MTBWYF) is inclusive and captures the demographic profile of its members so that young people are able to consider the views of underrepresented groups. This has also been incorporated into data collection methods linked to participation engagement methods e.g. focus groups, surveys etc.

Staff training and practice, as previously mentioned, ensures that the needs of children and young people are taken into consideration.

Embedding Participation and Children's Rights

Any department across the council proposing service changes has to provide elected members with an integrated impact assessment to inform decision making. This requires confirmation of the outcomes of consultations across affected members of the community, particularly those from disadvantaged groups – including children and young people.

Each directorate across the local authority is required to undertake a self-evaluation and a critical part of this is to demonstrate how they have engaged the community in relevant consultations in line with the participation strategy of the council, enhancing the individual responsibility and accountability for participation across the council.

Young People Say training is offered to internal departmental staff and external partners. This is via the commissioned participation contract with Safer Merthyr Tydfil. The training is developed and delivered by members of the Youth Cabinet and is based on Article 12 of the UNCRC. In April 2025 this was delivered to staff from 5 different organisations.

In addition, some departments have accessed regional co-production training to improve how it captures the views of its target audience, regardless of ages, and develops the services in partnership with interested parties and service users.

Children's rights training has been delivered for the Early Years sector across Merthyr Tydfil with children's voice observed as part of their CIW inspections.

Children's voice and children's rights are embedded into the new curriculum for early years. An annual reflective practice session is held with all early years providers where time is spent reflecting on how settings are performing against the Estyn/ CIW guidance on children's rights.

Good Practice Highlights

Here are some examples of effective participation:

- Young people were consulted with during the development phase (1 year) of the Big Lottery funded Snakes n Ladders project. As a result, youth advisory panels were set up and the themes of the project for the implementation phase were developed. The Youth Mayor is the Chair of the Snakes n Ladders Strategic Board.
- Young people have been part of the recruitment and selection process within the local authority for both front line services and at a strategic level e.g. Chief Executive Post, children's services etc. Young people are also co-opted onto some of the council's Scrutiny Committees as outlined in the council's Participation Strategy 2023-28.
- At a regional level, the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Public Health Team recently consulted with the Youth Forum on the School Nursing Service which has resulted in two local secondary schools once again receiving School Nurse support with further work being undertaken by the Health Board to recruit for the other schools.
- Through working with the Education Department and the Cwm Taf Morgannwg Safeguarding Board, young people from MTBWYF and the Snakes n Ladders project have co-produced a safeguarding video that is youth accessible and focuses on how to make a safeguarding referral. This was showcased during Safeguarding Week in November 2023. The work continues as young people are involved in developing resources to accompany the video.
- To develop young people's engagement in democracy, annual hustings and voting takes place for the office of the Youth Mayor, with around 2600 -2800 young people taking part each year. This process is supported by colleagues in Democratic Services.
- Young people chairing their own Looked After Reviews has been piloted and is now being further developed to roll this out wider.



Challenges/Barriers

- The principal barrier is the lack of funding and recognition of the importance of participation by Welsh Government.
- The Snakes and Ladders program is a good example of where a strategic partnership with young people can secure additional resources to listen to, develop and deliver on a range of projects that are important to young people. This has only been achievable through the extensive national lottery funding to support this programme.
- Outside of the formal young person's participation structure, the Youth Service receives many requests from external organisations to facilitate groups of young people for them to consult with. The service is not always able to support this due to the capacity of service staff and young people are beginning to report consultation fatigue.
- The UK Youth Parliament member is supported by the participation officer at Safer Merthyr Tydfil. However, as there are now high costs associated with this role (travel, overnight stays, conferences, etc.) there are concerns about the sustainability of this.
- Attendance at the Youth Forum has been hit and miss since the pandemic; compounded by the costs and logistics of transporting young people to access activities.

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13. Monmouthshire

Monmouthshire (Sir Fynwy) is a large rural border county with market towns (Abergavenny, Chepstow, Monmouth); higher average affluence and older age profile.

- **Population:** approx. **94,572** (mid 2024, all ages)
- **Children 0–17:** approx. **17,083**
- **Deprivation:** The only LA in Wales with no areas in the most deprived 10%, according to WIMD 2025.

Overview

Participation within Monmouthshire County Council is strongly rooted in youth work practice, with the Youth Service playing a central role in enabling children and young people to influence decisions that affect their lives. Responsibility for participation is understood as a shared endeavour, supported by strategic leadership for children and young people and operational delivery through youth services, alongside communications and engagement functions.

Participation is embedded across universal and targeted youth provision, with structured annual consultation processes such as Make Your Mark and the Youth Conference providing clear mechanisms for identifying priorities and informing service planning. The authority also demonstrates a commitment to using participation evidence to shape wider policy and practice, including education, wellbeing, community safety, and housing-related services.

Participation structures and approaches

Monmouthshire's core participation infrastructure is led through the Youth Service, where participation informs the design, delivery, and review of provision. The annual Make Your Mark consultation and subsequent Youth Conference form a central cycle of engagement, enabling large numbers of young people to identify priorities and develop recommendations for services. In 2025, over 3,500 young people took part, with priorities focusing on cost of living, mental health, and transport.

Participation is also embedded through a range of thematic and service-specific approaches. This includes youth voice shaping community safety work, annual budget consultations, wellbeing assessments under the Well-being of Future Generations framework, and service evaluations. In education, learner voice is captured through school-based mechanisms and cluster work, with survey data used collaboratively to inform curriculum and transition planning.

Targeted participation is evident within specialist services such as Compass, the youth homelessness prevention project, where young people are actively involved in shaping bespoke support plans, reviewing provision, and contributing to multi-agency discussions where appropriate. Participation is also embedded across inclusion, ALN, and care-experienced children's forums, ensuring individual and collective voices inform practice.

Embedding participation and children's rights

Children's participation is treated as a core youth work principle within Monmouthshire and is increasingly being strengthened across wider council functions. Awareness of participation and its importance has been raised with professionals and elected members through management meetings, forums, and events, alongside engagement with schools and education staff.

The authority draws on national participation resources and data sets, including SHRN and Make Your Mark, to inform planning and review. There is a clear emphasis on person-centred practice within ALN and inclusion work, with learner voice embedded in IDPs, one-page profiles, and training for schools and social workers.

Monmouthshire has identified the need to further strengthen participation within its policy framework and is exploring how participation principles can more consistently shape future practice across services.

Good practice/highlights

Monmouthshire's Make Your Mark and Youth Conference model demonstrates strong practice in large-scale, meaningful participation, with clear links between consultation, prioritisation, and service response. The authority provides feedback to young people on previous priorities and actions taken, helping to reinforce trust and accountability.

The integration of participation within specialist services, such as Compass, illustrates good practice in ensuring young people's voices shape individual support and influence wider system responses. Participation within wellbeing assessments and community safety work further highlights how youth voice is used beyond traditional forums.

Strong links between participation, inclusion, and rights-based practice are evident, particularly in ALN and autism-focused work, where young people contribute to training materials, films, and service development.

Barriers and Challenges

Monmouthshire identified several structural and contextual challenges to participation:

- Rurality and geography, which make it difficult to bring young people together consistently
- Transport limitations and patchy digital connectivity, particularly in more remote areas
- Inequality between affluent and disadvantaged communities, with pockets of deprivation compounding barriers to participation
- Capacity constraints, particularly within specialist projects such as Compass, limiting the ability to extend participation beyond core caseload activity
- Feedback loops, where the authority recognises a need to strengthen how outcomes of participation are communicated back to young people in a consistent, accessible way
- These challenges are recognised as systemic rather than reflective of a lack of commitment to participation.

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14. Neath Port Talbot

Neath Port Talbot - is a Coastal industrial authority with major steelmaking heritage; includes Afan and Neath valleys and significant rural uplands.

- **Population:** approx. **142,898** (mid 2024, all ages)
- **Children 0–15:** approx. **18,066**
- **Deprivation:** Multiple areas in the most deprived 10%, consistent with post-industrial Valleys authorities.

Overview

Participation officers work across various directorates within the local authority, such as Education, Social Services, and Corporate Services. The Council's Director for Strategy and Corporate Services oversees corporate engagement and co-chairs Priority Group 4 of the Early Years, Children & Young People's Plan (EYC&YPP).

The EYC&YPP is a partnership plan, reporting to the Public Service Board, with Education as the lead partner in co-ordinating and facilitating the five key workstreams. The plan sets out objectives for the Council and its partners to improve outcomes for children, young people, and families and has been developed and informed through wide engagement with our CYP and their families. Priority Outcome 4 focuses on ensuring that children and young people are listened to and have opportunities to participate in decision-making – it will also facilitate engagement of C&YP across the other four priorities of the plan. Throughout the duration of the Plan (2024-2029), Priority Group 4 will serve as the lead group for participation for both the Council and its partners.

The inclusion of Priority 4 in the EYC&YPP has raised the focus and profile of participation and engagement and progress is fed into reports for PSB. The five year plan is still in the early years but there has already been a lot of growth. Neath Port Talbot co-chair with other bodies for example Swansea Bay Health Board and Neath Port Talbot College Group to pool information and to avoid duplication.

Participation Structures

There is a Youth Council supported by the Youth Service which consists of 40 young children – 4 seats per school, this includes armed forces children, members of the LGBTQ community, young people with an ALN, young mums, young carers, young people from ethnic minorities and representatives from the vulnerable learner service. The young people are in the Youth Council for two years but some retain their seats to help new members learn how it works.

The Youth Council also has a representative on the British Youth Parliament, two seats for Welsh Youth Senedd members, a Youth Mayor and Deputy as well as an ambassador role for Welsh Language and Culture, and one for The Environment.

Children's Social Services has a well-established structure in place to ensure children's participation, for example with care-experienced young people through YoVo (Your Voice Matters) and HOPE Girls Rights Group, which has supported their involvement in planning and reviewing services. These groups have also been involved in raising awareness at a national level and ensuring the voices of care experienced young people are heard. There is also currently a programme of work with primary schools being developed to engage this cohort.

Embedding Childrens Rights

In recent years the authority has facilitated training for Youth Council members, which focuses on the role of the Youth Council and the UNCRC. Training has been developed to support delivery of the Council's Children & Young People's Participation & Engagement Strategy, led by Education. Implementation of the Strategy forms part of the action plan for Priority Group 4 and we anticipate progress on this in the coming months.

The Early Years, Children & Young People's Plan also recognizes the importance of building the capacity of children and young people to participate, and to build the capacity of the workforce, ensuring they have the skills they need to engage with children and young people. External organisations, such as Children in Wales and the Childrens Rights Unit, have previously delivered participation training on behalf of the authority.

The Early Years, Children & Young People's Plan and the Children & Young People's Participation & Engagement Strategy will provide the mechanisms for achieving this and further co-ordinate existing work in this area. The Plan provides a governance structure to ensure that challenges in embedding children's participation can be addressed.

Good Practice Highlights

- The Youth Council carry out county wide consultation via the Youth Council on a biannual basis, through its Change Starts With You survey. This process was developed by young people and is promoted through all secondary schools and community-based youth clubs. Specific groups of young people are also targeted to ensure that the survey is as inclusive as possible. These include young carers, LGBTQ+ young people, young people with Speech, Language and Communication needs, young parents, young people educated at home, post 16 young people who are not in education, employment or training and young people who have been referred to the youth service requiring youth work support.

- The local authority is committed at all levels to young people's participation. In addition to officer support to facilitate a range of participation activities the Youth Council meet with the Council's Cabinet on a quarterly basis and regularly meet with Cabinet Members and Senior Leadership Team.
- A range of in person engagement activities are undertaken as required to inform specific decisions, such as playground developments and the development of a new vocational centre. These are often developed with the support of local schools and are tailored to meet the needs of the young people involved.
- Children's Social Services groups including HOPE Girls Rights Group, has supported their involvement in planning and reviewing services, they have also been involved in raising awareness at a national level and ensuring the voices of care experienced young people are heard – [see here](#). Social workers are being recruited with the HOPE group helping train and educate.
- A digital engagement mechanism 'Have your Say', which is delivered through Microsoft Teams, is in relatively early stages of delivery and allows us to reach out to groups of primary school pupils to understand their views on service delivery and planning. Questions are posted to Teams monthly and children are able to record videos to give their thoughts and views on the topic.

Challenges/Barriers

- The timescales around decision making can makes it difficult to do meaningful participation and engagement on some things. Also, the time needed to deliver actions and implement change can sometimes be lengthy and may not be seen by young people involved with the participation activities
- Engagement is becoming more challenging with young people not wanting to sit and have meetings, and are reluctant to be on the council. There has been a lack of interest and aspiration in young people.
- Finding people who are willing to speak freely is harder, using pre established groups has become an easier option.
- More barriers for care experienced young people - There isn't much representation from young people in care – as they can find it overwhelming. Children in care not having the life skills they need, training has now started being provided to help with this.
- National Participation Standards has lost its way; more direction and support is needed to ensure that work fits with a wider framework.
- Building effective and sustainable relationships with schools takes time. Co-ordinating this work can be challenging due to the need for time and capacity to be built in to achieve this. Conversations as part of Priority Group 4 meetings have highlighted the need for additional capacity to further co-ordinate, develop and embed participation and engagement work.

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15. Newport

Newport is a fast growing urban authority; key economic hub in southeast Wales with strong M4 corridor connectivity.

- **Population:** approx. **163,628** (mid 2024, all ages)
- **Children 0–15:** TBC
- **Deprivation:** One of the highest proportion LAs for areas in the most deprived 10% (**18%** of LSOAs).

Overview

Participation in Newport City Council is embedded as a shared responsibility across services, rather than located within a single team. While Youth and Play Services hold significant operational expertise, accountability for participation sits with individual Heads of Service, supported by corporate oversight through the Partnership, Policy and Communications Team. This structure enables participation to influence planning, delivery and review across education, children's services, youth justice and corporate parenting.

Participation activity is strengthened through partnership working with third sector organisations and community groups, supporting inclusive and co-produced approaches that reach children and young people across a wide range of settings and experiences.

Participation Structures and Approaches

Newport's participation landscape includes multiple complementary structures. The Newport Youth Council provides a central forum for young people aged 11–25 to engage in decision-making, consultations and civic processes. The Youth Council has been operating for several years and has recently been brought back in-house, supporting stronger links with corporate planning and accountability processes.

In education, the Children and Young People's Grand Council offers an early participation route for primary-aged children, helping to build confidence, voice and understanding of democratic processes from a younger age. These structures are supported by a wider range of forums and co-production groups, including advisory boards within Youth Justice, Disabled Children's Services, care-experienced forums delivered with Barnardo's, and co-production groups with young carers.

Participation is embedded across planning, delivery and review stages, with children and young people contributing to service design, recruitment panels, participatory budgeting, policy development and service evaluation. Feedback mechanisms are built into Youth Council and forum activity, enabling children and young people to see how their input has influenced outcomes.

Embedding Participation and Children's Rights

Participation in Newport is underpinned by a strong emphasis on co-production and equality. Children's rights and participation principles are reflected in service planning and are reinforced through training, inspection feedback and corporate quality assurance processes. The Partnership, Policy and Communications Team plays a key gate-keeping role in ensuring that reports to Cabinet and senior decision-makers demonstrate due regard to children's participation and equality considerations.

Services such as Youth and Play, Disabled Children's Services and Children's Services have developed participation action plans and identified participation champions to support consistency and learning. While practice is well established in some teams, the authority recognises that embedding participation across all services is an ongoing process requiring sustained leadership, capacity and coordination.

Good Practice/Highlights

- Newport demonstrates strong practice in co-production and inclusive participation. Notable examples include young people sitting on recruitment panels for participation roles, participatory budgeting programmes involving children and young people as bidders and decision-makers, and the development of the Young Carers Covenant through sustained co-production with young carers.
- The use of multiple participation routes — including Youth Council, Grand Council, advisory boards and community-based engagement — helps ensure that participation is not limited to a single forum. Newport's work with disabled children and care-experienced young people illustrates a commitment to adapting participation approaches to meet different communication, access and support needs.

Barriers and Challenges

Despite strong practice, Newport identified a number of challenges that affect the sustainability and reach of participation:

- Digital and policy constraints, including safeguarding, data protection and corporate communications policies, which limit the platforms and approaches services can use to engage children and young people online.
- Communication and promotion delays, caused by internal approval processes, which can reduce responsiveness and immediacy.
- Representation gaps, particularly for disabled children, care-experienced children and young people from minority backgrounds, where geography, transport, communication needs and family capacity affect engagement.
- Accessibility challenges, including finding venues that genuinely meet the needs of disabled children requiring specialist facilities and support.
- Staff capacity and funding pressures, with short-term funding cycles limiting long-term planning, co-production and sustainability.
- Participation fatigue and risk of tokenism, where previous engagement has not always resulted in visible outcomes, requiring stronger feedback loops and clearer impact.

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16. Pembrokeshire

Pembrokeshire (Sir Benfro): is a large rural and coastal authority with tourism driven economy; includes Pembrokeshire Coast National Park and towns such as Haverfordwest and Pembroke Dock.

- **Population:** approx. **125,006** (mid 2024, all ages)
- **Children 0–15:** approx. **15,249**
- **Deprivation:** Contains some areas in the most deprived 10%, typical of coastal and ruralurban mixed counties.

Overview

The Children and Young People's Rights Office sits within Pembrokeshire Youth Services which is part of the Education Directorate. They have a dedicated Children and Young People's Rights Office, supported by two members of staff, which plays a central role in embedding a rights-based approach across the authority.

A range of engagement methods are used to ensure that children and young people from a wide range of backgrounds are engaged and their voices are heard and influence decision-making at all levels. There is commitment to continuing this work and deepening opportunities for children and young people to shape decisions that affect them.

Participation Structures and Approaches

The views of children and young people are gathered through a range of engagement methods to ensure their voices are heard and influence decision-making at all levels. Some examples are:

Biennial Youth Ballot: Every two years, they conduct a "What Matters to You" ballot, reaching thousands of young people through schools, youth services, training providers, and online platforms.

Targeted Events and Conferences: they hold a variety of themed events designed and led by young people. For example, last year they ran a Hate Crime Conference, facilitated by the Young Voices for Choices Youth Forum and a 'Day of Action', coordinated by Junior Safeguardians, focusing on safeguarding and wellbeing.

Youth Forums and Groups: They maintain a range of forums and participation groups across the county to represent diverse voices and communities. These include issue-based, locality-based, and demographic-specific forums that meet regularly to share views, review services, and inform policy development. Pems has 2 active community youth forums in Milford and Haverfordwest (the capacity of CYPRO means they can only support two).

Forums happen just before youth club so if any young person is waiting for youth club they are invited in, the CYPRO officer works in the youth club too – this encourages more YP to give the forum a go as they already know the staff - Nadine and Bethany.

Pembrokeshire LA are committed to making participation opportunities inclusive for all young people, particularly those who are vulnerable or underrepresented. Trusted professionals such as youth workers, ALN staff, and social workers are used to reach young people who may not engage through traditional forums. Participation activities are delivered in a variety of settings including

schools, youth clubs, PLC, and other settings to meet young people where they are. When holding events in schools, they ask for a cross-section of pupils who are representative of the wider school community to ensure a diverse range of voices are included. They also support specific groups, such as care-experienced young people and those with ALN, to ensure their voices are heard. A range of engagement methods are used to suit different needs, and they provide additional support to help build confidence and enable meaningful involvement.

Embedding Participation and Children's Rights

In 2014, Pembrokeshire County Council (PCC) formally pledged its commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and they are currently seeking permission to update this pledge to reflect ongoing progress and priorities.

Participation is included in the wider corporate function, which is seen to be the best vehicle for embedding participation.

They have a dedicated Children and Young People's Rights Office (CYPRO), supported by two members of staff, which plays a central role in embedding a rights-based approach across the authority. The CYPRO team also supports the wider corporate function and are the first port of call for others if decisions are impacting CYP rights.

Their role includes supporting consultations when they are needed and leading a Biennial 'What Matters' survey and sharing its results with cabinet.

Young people are provided with multiple opportunities to influence decision-making and co-produce projects. This includes active involvement in service planning, consultations, and reviews. Young people regularly participate in interview panels for staff recruitment, helping to shape the workforce that supports them. They also have opportunities to engage directly with elected members, ensuring their voices are heard at the highest level of local governance.

Good Practice/Highlights – this includes some of the highlights.

- **Recruitment and Selection:** Young people are actively involved in the recruitment of staff across services mainly Education and Social Care. There has been a recent review of and update to interview panel training to better support young participants.
- **Reviewing Services:** the local group for care-experienced young people (EYPOP) has recently contributed to the development of a new Therapy Framework, ensuring that their lived experiences directly shape how support is delivered. This group meet with the corporate parenting board and they have recruited a head of service.
- **Policy and Programme Development:** The Pembrokeshire Youth Assembly has designed and developed a Mental Health Literacy Game for young people, directly informed by the priorities identified in the 2023 "What Matters to You" youth ballot. This innovative resource was co-produced with support from the Primary Mental Health Team and the School In-Reach Team.
- **Large-Scale Consultation:** The 2025 "What Matters to You" ballot reached over 5,000 young people across Pembrokeshire. The Youth Assembly is now working in partnership with the CYPRO to co-produce a programme of work that responds to the findings, ensuring young people's priorities directly shape service delivery.



- Budget Consultation: Young people are consistently included in the local authority's budget consultation processes, giving them a voice in financial decisions that affect their lives and communities.
- 'The Great Council Bake Off': Young members of the youth council work in a partnership with council members/ senior leaders to create a cake. It's a youth work activity that enables YP to ask questions they might have, and they try to match the young person up with the cabinet member who holds that portfolio to make it a more meaningful exchange/ opportunity for relationship building.
- A town councillor regularly attends one of the Youth Forum meetings – staff wanted it noted that her energy and commitment to this makes a huge difference to the engagement of CYP.

Barriers and Challenges

Some of the key barriers identified in promoting and facilitating meaningful participation include:

Transport: Pembrokeshire's rural geography presents challenges in ensuring all children and young people can physically attend meetings, events, or engagement sessions, particularly those living in more isolated communities.

Limited access to a ring-fenced budget: Without a dedicated budget for participation activities, it can be difficult to plan consistently and offer meaningful opportunities that are accessible, inclusive, and sustainable.

Staff capacity: With a small team supporting children's rights and participation, there are limits to how many projects and engagement opportunities can be facilitated at any one time. This can impact ability to follow up promptly and maintain regular contact with all groups of young people.

Some of the groups with whom there is less current engagement include:

- Gypsy Roma Traveller children and young people. There is no longer a dedicated unit for GRT CYP, therefore it is now harder to get this collective voice
- Home Educated children – there are no direct links but there is a plan to engage via wider LA staff in the new year.
- It was identified that there could be more awareness of rights/ participation by cabinet members to enable them to hold the CYPRO team to account.

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17. Powys

Powys is the largest and most sparsely populated county in Wales; predominantly rural with extensive uplands and small market towns (e.g., Brecon, Newtown, Welshpool).

- **Population:** approx. **134,439** (mid 2024, all ages)
- **Children 0–15:** approx. **15,096**
- **Deprivation:** Only one LSOA in the most deprived 10% nationally (among the lowest counts in Wales).

Overview

Participation is everyone's responsibility within their service areas, and something that we aim for at an operational and strategic level. There is a Public Participation Strategy for the council. We have a dedicated Children's Services Participation Officer (Matt Rising) and an Equalities and Engagement Young Peoples Officer in the Youth Service/Education (Jess Metcalf).

Participation Structures

Through the Junior Startwell Board (JSWB), which is firmly embedded in the Start Well Partnership arena and a part of the Regional Partnership Board, young people's voices are actively heard and valued. Communication is two-way and meaningful where young people not only contribute their views but also receive feedback on how their input shaping decisions. They have the opportunity to meet the Chair three times a year, ensuring a direct line of dialogue that promotes transparency and accountability. We strive to involve children and young people at every stage of service development. Their lived experiences and insights help shape priorities, influence delivery models and inform ongoing service reviews, ensuring our approach remains relevant and responsive to their needs.

The Youth Service uses the 5 pillars of Youth work – Educative, Empowering, Participative, Inclusive and Expressive to plan, deliver, and evaluate its work effectively. Throughout the process the young people are supported to express themselves and develop their confidence and voice. Evaluation focuses on the impact of the work in each of these areas, using feedback and reflection to assess learning outcomes, levels of engagement, empowerment, inclusion and self-expression. This approach ensures that the service remains responsive to young people's needs and experiences while upholding the core values of youth work and participation.

Participation is open to anyone who lives, works, studies, etc. in Powys from 0 to 100+. The teams work with young people 3 years - 25 years and up to their 26th birthday.

Embedding Participation and Children's Rights

Powys has embedded children's participation into aspects of planning, delivery and reviewing services, through the work of the Junior Startwell Board and through the support of youth services as outlined above.

In addition to this, a draft Youth Engagement Strategy has been developed and is going out for consultation with young people before it is shared with wider stakeholders for comments. This ensures that young people are meaningfully involved from the outset and that their perspectives shape the strategy itself. It also supports the wider ambition of embedding consistent, high-quality youth engagement practices across the county.

The Youth Engagement Strategy once completed and agreed by both young people and the Cabinet, will be a key step towards addressing these issues and creating a more inclusive, responsive, and impactful model of participation across Powys.

Good Practice Highlights -

- The Junior Start Well Board (JSWB) has delivered several impactful, youth-led initiatives that have directly improved services for young people in Powys. They designed and launched a Youth Café in Newtown, creating a safe, welcoming space with Wi-Fi, refreshments, and youth worker support – addressing a clear gap identified by their peers. Following the pandemic, JSWB conducted a county-wide emotional health survey, which led to the reinstatement of school nurses and informed future wellbeing initiatives. Their advocacy work has influenced regional policy, including contributions to the NYTH/ NEST Framework through direct engagement with senior Welsh Government officials. They also developed plans for mental health assemblies in schools and expanded representation by forming a group for 18–25-year-olds. These projects demonstrate how meaningful youth participation can lead to real-world change, better services, and stronger community connections.
- Sustainable Powys Young Peoples engagement event – young person’s listening event to understand what matters to them in the future of Powys. This event is to be branded as “Your Powys” and forms part of the wider Sustainable Powys engagement activity. This event was the first time that it has been attempted at such a scale and will be used as a prototype for future engagement activity with young people.
- Young people in children’s services supported by a Participation Officer have worked with the third sector to get comfort cases and be involved in Voices from Care Cymru radical reform summits, this has empowered them to speak up and engage in events. Young people involved in interview panels for relevant local authority jobs that affect their lives.
- From assemblies conducted in High Schools across the county and talking to LGBTQ+ groups, young people have shown interest and commitment in setting up groups, these groups are used as platforms for awareness raising, support, educating and bringing together minority groups.
- Young people, through participation activities, were able to contribute to a national study with End Youth Homelessness Cymru, about their experiences of Neurodiversity, which was published and promoted across Wales, and presented to Welsh Government Ministers.

Challenges/Barriers

- In Powys, key barriers to promoting and facilitating meaningful participation include the county’s vast geography and limited transport infrastructure, which restricts access to engagement opportunities, particularly for this in rural or isolated areas.
- There are also significant differences in local needs and priorities across the county, making a one-size-fits-all approach ineffective, while highlighting the need for consistency in the quality and accessibility of participation opportunities.
- Digital exclusion remains a challenge, with unreliable broadband and varying degrees of digital confidence limiting online engagement.



- A culture of tokenism persists, where participation, especially from young people, is too often treated as a tick-box exercise rather than a meaningful process with real influence.
- Even when young people's voices are heard, there is a lack of clear structures to escalate their input and translate into decisions and service design. Tangible outcomes are needed in the short, medium and long term to demonstrate that their participation leads to real change and is truly valued.
- Additionally, the fear of speaking out, whether due to lack of confidence or fear of judgement, or concerns of consequences, can significantly limit participation, particularly among the more vulnerable or marginalised individuals.
- Recruitment and retention issues across the authority/county further reduces the capacity to maintain trusted, long-term engagement. To address these barriers, participation must be embedded as a core practice, resources adequately, delivered consistency and underpinned by a culture of trust, safety, and genuine influence.
- The Youth Engagement Strategy once completed and agreed by both young people and the Cabinet, will be a key step towards addressing these issues and creating a more inclusive, responsive, and impactful model of participation across Powys.

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18. Rhondda Cynon Taf

RCT is a Densely populated Valleys authority with major towns (Pontypridd, Aberdare, Tonypandy); steep valleys and postindustrial landscapes.

- **Population:** approx. **241,178** (mid 2024, all ages)
- **Children 0–15:** approx. **31,440**
- **Deprivation:** Multiple areas within the most deprived 10%; typical of South Wales Valleys pattern.

Overview

Participation in RCT Council is a cross-directorate responsibility that sits within the Youth Service, Children's Services, and Education Services.

Participation is conducted in a variety of different ways, including direct work with families, providing opportunities for feedback, conducting reviews, and holding consultations within residential homes, to ensure the opportunities are inclusive of vulnerable or under-represented groups.

The views of children and young people are gathered primarily through consultations. As an example, they will speak to care experienced young people at their Drop-In about a strategy they have been drafting, to gather their views and make changes based on their feedback.

Participation Structures

There is no single corporate approach to participation across the local authority, though there are efforts to link education and youth services.



The Education Service has a Strategy for Pupil Voice as part of their new Education Strategy, which involves senior management speaking directly to pupils to understand their needs across 17 school clusters.

The Youth Services team engages with 9,000 young people every year. 1-to-1 support is available aimed at improving youth health and mental well-being. The Participation Strategy includes a "Your Voice" survey to inform the next 5-year plan. There is support for four local Youth Forums and a county-wide Forum that are shaping initiatives that affect young people e.g. school menus. In addition to this there is a forum for neurodiverse children and young people, four Welsh Language Youth Forums, as well as support to participate in the Senedd leuenctid. A dedicated Digital Development Officer supports engagement via social media. There are open access youth clubs and democracy workshops run in schools and a drop-in centre for 14+ available twice weekly.

Embedding Participation and Childrens Rights

RCT Children's Services has a powerful vision, set of values and practical guidance which have been developed collaboratively with practitioners.

Vision Statement

In RCT we want to ensure all children and young people have the best start in life and can learn and grow safely. In Children's Services, we recognise sometimes children and families need additional support to achieve this. Establishing relationships based on our values, we work alongside children and families, building on strengths to enable positive change, whilst always prioritising our role in keeping children safe.

Values Statements

- **Family:** We promote children's right to a family life. We will always work to the ethos 'family first' and will think widely about what family might mean to a child.
- **Support:** We support families to get the right help at the right time, we step up support, step down support but don't step away too soon.
- **Respect:** We respect people's unique individuality, their circumstances and choices, and involve young people and their families in our work and decisions about their lives and circumstances.
- **Compassion** When seeking to help we take a trauma-informed approach, prioritising empathy and building positive relationships when working with children and families.
- **Family Strengths and Safeguarding:** We work with families to identify outcomes they want to achieve, building on strengths, and clearly identifying and working to reduce risks.
- **Stability:** We promote stability for looked after young people and know that they will need specialist help during their journey.
- **Pride** We take pride in the achievements of the people we support, and the work we do with them.
- **Improve:** We are curious about how effective our work is, we understand the impact and are always ready to improve and innovate.

This vision and these values are consistent with the UNCRC (and indeed specifically refer to some rights) and participation principles, but the link between these could be made stronger.

Good Practice Highlights

- RCT youth services work is particularly extensive, engaging 9,000 young people every year. It has a youth worker embedded in every secondary school in the local authority.
- They have a strong commitment to participation principles, for example co-producing an animated video on corporate parenting with care-experienced young people.
- Youth involved in budget consultations and play services (over 1,000 children and parents consulted).
- Corporate board councillors meet youth for direct feedback, which is relayed back to children.
- Encouragement for 16+ to join the corporate parenting board, with materials made more child-friendly.
- Within Children's Services they held a 'Get Involved' survey for care experienced young people, to find out what was going well for them, what could be better, and how they would like to be involved. The results of the survey were fed back to young people in a 'You Said...We Did' format, highlighting their commitment to making improvements for young people. As an example, young people aged 16-24 highlighted that there was a lack of information about benefits and mental health and wellbeing. To improve this, RCT re-designed the website, and included clear and accessible information about the benefits and entitlements that young people could access, along with how to access mental health and wellbeing information. Young people were able to review the information and approve it before it was published on the website

Challenges/Barriers

Despite strong practice, RCT identified a number of challenges that affect the sustainability and reach of participation.

- Need for dedicated resources and funding, especially for hard-to-reach and exploited children;
- Challenges in engaging younger children due to planning/time demands;
- Additional funding needed to expand participation work with young carers;
- Lack of time and a dedicated team to support the participation of young unaccompanied asylum seeking children and assist with the challenges they face (finding interpreters, lack of solicitors, accommodation etc.);
- Change in culture since the pandemic – harder to encourage people to participate now.
- Transport is a significant barrier, especially for young carers.

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19. Swansea

Second largest city in Wales; 69% rural/31% urban, but 86.7% of population in coastal urban belt.

- **Population:** approx. **246,742** (mid 2024, all ages)
- **Children 0–15:** approx. **30,249**
- **Deprivation:** 13.3% of LSOAs (20 of 150) in most deprived 10% (WIMD 2025).

Overview

Participation in Swansea Council takes a whole-council approach, led through the Social Services Directorate via the Partnership & Involvement and Learning and Innovation Teams, with Education working closely as a key partner. The Partnership & Involvement Team focuses on the co-ordination and collaborative working around the statutory commitment to facilitating county-wide mechanisms to hear the voices of Children and Young People, supported by Education through schools and education settings to help embed and amplify learner voice

A dedicated Participation and Children's Rights Officer embedded within Child and Family Services ensures that the voices, rights, and lived experiences of care experienced children and young people are not only heard but actively shape service delivery.

Meaningful participation is recognised as a shared responsibility, and to support this Swansea Council has adopted a satellite model; empowering practitioners across different teams to engage young people in shaping the services they use.

Participation Structures and Approaches

Participation opportunities are embedded across the authority and within different services. For example, each of their Evolve Youth Hubs has established its own Young People's Advisory Board, giving young people a direct voice in how support is delivered in their communities. In the Youth Justice Service, young people are not just consulted—they are coproducing elements of the service, helping to design interventions that are meaningful and relevant to their experiences.

Their Contextual Missing Exploited and Trafficked (CMET) team has also developed a dedicated Youth Board, providing a structured platform for young people to influence decision-making and service planning. Meanwhile, the Foster Swansea, Kinship Care, and Special Guardianship Order (SGO) Support Teams each run youth panels, ensuring that the perspectives of children and young people are central to how they support families and carers.

Swansea Council's "Big Conversation" is a model for engaging with children and young people to gather their views on issues that impact their lives and to influence council policy. It's a county-wide mechanism that provides a platform for them to raise concerns and participate in decision-making processes through in a variety of ways, ensuring that quiet voices are also heard outside of traditional formal structures.

There are a range of advisory boards, panels, and forums that seek to reflect the diversity of the population - these include youth-led boards within Early Help Hubs, co-production groups within justice and care services, and community panels that inform housing, education, and health strategies. There is also use of informal and creative engagement methods – such as podcasts, drop-in sessions, and digital platforms. Community spaces like the Collaboration Station and the

One Stop Info Shop offer welcoming environments for residents to share ideas and take part in local decision-making.

Participation Champions across services help embed a culture of listening and co-production, ensuring that engagement is not a one-off event but an ongoing dialogue.

There is commitment to transparency and accountability - Feedback from engagement activities is shared through "You Said, We Did" reporting, and they are currently developing a comprehensive overview of recent participation work to inform future planning and avoid duplication.

Embedding Participation and Children's Rights

In 2014, Swansea Council launched its Children and Young People's Rights Scheme, becoming the first UK local authority to formally embed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into its policy framework. This duty mandates that the Cabinet must have "due regard" to UNCRC rights when developing, reviewing, or changing policies, strategies, or services

This whole council commitment to Children's Rights and Participation is explicit within service impact assessments and developed with guidance at a central/corporate level. Having the Participations and Children's Rights Officer within the Learning and Innovation Team of Child and Family Service, alongside Transformation and Performance Hubs enables the voices and lived experiences of care experienced children and young people to directly inform service design, performance reporting, and continuous improvement. As a result of this alignment performance dashboards integrate youth insight alongside quantitative data. -Service redesigns, such as within Evolve Youth Hubs and the Youth Justice Service, have been co-produced with young people. Corporate Parenting Pledges and associated action plans have been developed and monitored with direct input from care-experienced young people.

What Matters Conversations are embedded into transformation planning, ensuring services respond to real-time feedback. The approach is further strengthened by the use of the Signs of Safety framework, which is inherently participatory and co-productive. This methodology places children and young people at the centre of planning and decision-making, encouraging practitioners to work collaboratively with families to identify strengths, assess risks, and co-create solutions. It aligns naturally with the participation strategy, reinforcing a commitment to rights-based, person-centred practice.

Within the education services there is a termly learner voice planning group that consider opportunities for participation. Participation findings contribute to the review of services (e.g. school dinners) and opportunities are also used to develop policy/delivery (e.g. behaviour in schools). Education report annually on learner voice to the Scrutiny Performance Panel for Education which includes work that has been done jointly by the Partnership & Involvement Team and Education services. The Partnership and Involvement Team, collaborate with the Early Years Integration Team to support settings working towards or that have achieved the Healthy and Sustainable Pre-Schools Scheme (HSPSS) in which are assessed on how well they promote self-help skills. This includes practices such as enabling children to access drinking water independently throughout the day and involving them in preparing and serving their own meals and snacks.



Good Practice/Highlights

- Swansea has declared itself a Human Rights city with children's right woven into this framework. This human rights approach ensures the same rights-based language being used for all ages and so aids transition. There is mandatory e-learning on human rights, including children's rights – across the authority.
- There is strong corporate buy-in and visibility of CYP participation at cabinet level – for example, full council met with young people to discuss the young people's manifesto.
- There is recognition that one size doesn't fit all and they support a diversity of participation routes — including the Big Conversation, community-based participation (One stop shop and Collaboration Station) which offer welcoming environments for residents to share ideas and take part in local decision-making, as well as commissioning of specialist groups eg. EYST and YMCA to support participation of diverse groups including ethnic minorities and young carers.

Barriers and Challenges

Despite strong practice, Swansea identified a number of challenges that affect the sustainability and reach of participation:

- Statutory nature of work means there are limits to how much influence CYP can have on core service offer.
- Participation offer needs to be trauma-informed, requires a sensitive and flexible approach
- Safeguarding and statutory responsibilities can limit capacity to engage in wider participation activities.
- Concept of corporate parenting, can be difficult to communicate in a way that resonates with young people.
- Over-consultation of care-experienced CYP
- Colleagues in Education have highlighted the need for a dedicated staff member with protected time to focus specifically on participation within the education sector. This role could support activities such as facilitating pupil voice forums, coordinating feedback from children and young people on service delivery, supporting schools to embed participation in their improvement plans, and ensuring that learners are actively involved in shaping policies and practices that affect them.
- Sometimes tight time scales can compromise meaningful participation and engagement, and ensuring effective feedback can at times be challenging

Child and Family participation is CFSParticipation@swansea.gov.uk – anyone with participation queries and feedback relating to Swansea Child and Family Services to send it through to this address.

UNCRC@swansea.gov.uk – for children's rights related issues or participation opportunities more generally.

education@Swansea.gov.uk – queries/feedback in relation to learner voice to be sent through to this address.



20. Torfaen

Torfaen is a compact Valleys authority with urban centres like Pontypool and Cwmbran; blend of industrial heritage and suburban development.

- **Population:** approx. **93,419** (mid 2024, all ages)
- **Children 0–15:** approx. **12,286**
- **Deprivation:** Contains several areas in the most deprived 10% in Wales.

Overview

The responsibility for participation sits within Communications in Torfaen. The communications officer originally sat within public relations team but after evaluation there was an amalgamation of the schools teams; communications; engagement and PR.

This acts as a professional engagement function for children and young people to feed into the council and communications links to all services, this has focused the council so as to be as supportive to CYP as possible.

Participation Structures

As the participation job sits within communications it makes it more accessible to young people, children and young people's voice doesn't stop when they become an adult, informs services throughout the organisation, this provides a broader corporate view.

Torfaen Youth Forum offers young people the chance to tell the council about issues that are important to them, and to contribute to decisions the council makes. The forum is open to young people aged between 11 and 18 who live in Torfaen. It meets once a month during the school term.

Members are recruited once a year through schools, youth clubs and community groups and set priorities to work on for the year ahead.

The Torfaen Youth Alliance is made up of representatives from local secondary schools and members of 17 different young people's organisations. It aims to identify common issues for most young people and potential solutions which will be passed onto the council.

The Torfaen Youth Forum is one of the forums involved in the youth alliance. Members meet three times a year. The work of the alliance is shaped by the council's Children and Young People's Participation Strategy. It is supported by a steering group including statutory, voluntary and school settings.

Embedding Participation and Children's Rights

Torfaen has children's voice included in all Team plans within the Education Service and ensure that how participation is done is part of the annual service planning day. Corporately there are many examples of Children and Young People's voice be part of planning, delivery and reviewing services such as Scrutiny Committees, further work is being done to embed participation and rights in the planning, delivery and reviewing services.

The authority has facilitated training on the promotion of participation to the Play Service, Youth Service, Housing, and commissioned training for PSB managers in last 5 years.

Torfaen staff have used 'The Right Way – Self- assessment' to encourage teams across the Children and Families Directorate to map Children and Young Peoples voice in our 2024/25 plans and set measurable targets. Each team reported via their Leadership Teams to the Evaluation and Improvement Officer who ensured consistency, by monitoring the implementation of the plans to ensure change was monitored.

Good Practice Highlights

- Young people regularly feed into scrutiny committees, it is set as a minimum that children and young people will attend and ask questions
- Care experienced young people are involved in the corporate parenting board. Torfaen offer work experience or apprenticeships targeted for care experienced young people which could lead to permanent position, this has been included in our Workforce development strategy.
- Torfaen run 'Take Over days' – where children and young people take over the council and senior roles in the organisation as well as making decisions and they hold officials accountable to these decisions. Young people apply for the roles, make applications. They sit in council and this is not about just listening but co-producing with them!
- The Torfaen Youth Alliance is inclusive of vulnerable or underrepresented groups and lead workers support them to attend and engage.e.g for those who may face more challenges to have voice heard this includes young people from the gypsy, roma traveller community and young people involved in youth justice services.
- Young people identified that there needed to be more social media engagement with young people so Torfaen has hired an young apprentice to work on creating the right social media channels with and for young people to encourage and support engagement in services for them. The Apprentice will be leading this communications strategy on behalf of the council.
- There is a well delivered play provision across Torfaen that supports outreach play, play in centres across the county and summer playschemes, they have collaborates to all run a piece work around Article 12 'you right to be listened to and for your biews to be taken seriously', the participation officer had given training to 200 volunteers beforehand.

Challenges/Barriers

- There is a challenge in supporting services to realise the importance of participation when they may not have a face to face role with young people. Have they got skills to do participation well?
- This is a challenge to ensure we quality assure to make sure children and young peoples voice is a way of working for all the directorates and not just children and young people facing services.
- Young people we met identified 'You have to have some confidence to get involved, anxious people might struggle in meetings.'

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21. Vale of Glamorgan Council

Vale of Glamorgan A coastal authority west of Cardiff; includes Barry, Penarth, and rural Vale farmland; mix of suburban and rural landscapes.

- **Population:** approx. **134,733** (mid 2024, all ages)
- **Children 0–15:** approx. **18,297**
- **Deprivation:** Contains pockets of deprivation but generally lower concentration than many South Wales authorities.

Overview

The responsibility for participation sits within Communications in Torfaen. The communications officer originally sat within public relations team but after evaluation there was an amalgamation of the schools teams; communications; engagement and PR.

Participation within the Vale of Glamorgan is well established, with strong youth service-led practice and a clear ambition to embed participation consistently across all directorates. While youth teams currently lead much of the work, there is a clear organisational commitment to ensuring children and young people's voices influence decision-making at political, strategic and service-delivery levels. A strong emphasis on inclusion and early involvement underpins the Vale's approach.

Participation structures and approaches

Participation activity in the Vale is framed by a Public Participation Strategy, coordinated through the Communications team, with delivery shared across multiple services. Lead officers meet through an internal participation network to share learning, align approaches and collaborate on engagement activity.

The Vale Youth Service, located within the Education directorate, plays a central role in facilitating children and young people's participation, as does the Sports & Play Development Team (who are located in the Environment and Housing directorate). This includes leading the Vale Youth Council, local Youth Action Groups, the Young Sports Ambassadors programme, secondary school council network meetings, and a range of participation projects linked to local and national consultations. They also support Town Councils with the set up and maintenance of Town Youth Councils. Young people are supported to engage not only in youth-led spaces but also within adult departments young people are directly involved in:

- Scrutiny processes, including co-opted membership on the Start Well Scrutiny Committee
- Budget consultations and corporate plan development
- Service redesign and commissioning, including school-based counselling services
- Placemaking activity across the Vale's towns

A notable strength is the Secondary School Council Network, which brings together pupils from all secondary schools on a termly basis to share practice, raise issues and engage directly with elected members and senior officers.

Alongside this, the Vale has developed a strong Rights Ambassadors programme, where young people deliver UNCRC and participation training to adults and practitioners, strengthening a rights-based culture across schools and services, under a new sustainable model of participation in the Vale of Glamorgan, schools are embedding this and delivering as a cluster based model with St Cyres secondary school leading this new approach.

Embedding participation and children's rights

Participation and children's rights are embedded through:

- Mandatory UNCRC and children's rights content within youth service and Play Team inductions, and within Young Sports Leadership and Play Leadership training.
- Youth-led training delivered through the Youth Voice projects
- Regular consultation with young people on high-profile decisions, including budgets and corporate planning

Young people are involved across planning, delivery and review stages:

- Shaping corporate priorities (e.g. Vale 2030 Corporate Plan)
- Influencing service delivery models within education and children's services
- Evaluating services through ongoing scrutiny and feedback mechanisms

Participation is treated as a core part of service delivery rather than a one-off activity, with young people supported to engage meaningfully in adult decision-making spaces.

Good practice/highlights

The Vale demonstrates strong practice in early and meaningful involvement, with clear examples of youth teams challenging proposals where young people were not consulted, such as local infrastructure developments.

Key highlights include:

- Make Your Mark 2024, where the Vale achieved the highest voter turnout in Wales, with results feeding directly into the Corporate Plan. Make Your Mark 2026 was a local project, with even more young people voting than 2024, increasing the engagement with over 6000 young people engaging.
- Children and young people play an active role in shaping the Vale Sport & Physical Activity Plan. Over 4,000 contributed via the School Sport Survey, and more than 140 Young Sports Ambassadors provide ongoing input. In 2025, a Female Young Ambassadors network was established to give young women a platform to advocate for their peers, support consultation and influence future plans. Young Ambassador representatives attend the annual regional conference to network and further develop their roles, and there is a Vale representative on the National YA panel.
- The Member of UK Youth Parliament's work, reaching young people on different topics for national policy work and young people exercising their democratic right to vote for their representative
- Youth co-production in commissioning school-based counselling services, with ongoing scrutiny of delivery



- The Secondary School Council Network, providing a consistent county-wide pupil voice mechanism
- The Rights Ambassadors Project, delivering rights-based training and strengthening links with the Children’s Commissioner for Wales. This will be reshaped into a Young Inspector’s Programme to ensure the Youth Service are embedding participation standards and the UNCRC into their practice and delivery across all provisions
- Her Voice Wales, a girls-led project addressing safety for young women and girls, recognised through a Youth Excellence Award which has concluded following their campaign reaching an international level

The Vale’s approach to inclusion is particularly strong, with targeted work to engage underrepresented groups and a “snowball” model where less confident young people are supported to bring peers into participation spaces. There is a high level of inclusion of children with additional learning needs within youth panels and groups.

Barriers and challenges

Despite strong practice, several challenges were identified:

- Funding and capacity, with approximately 65% of youth service roles and approximately 90% of Sports & Play roles grant funded, leading to instability and staff turnover
- Limited long-term funding impacts the ability to sustain participation work, to follow through on actions and feedback outcomes to young people

Transport and geography, particularly for rural communities, limits access to participation opportunities, and young people are reluctant to engage in hybrid work

- Participation is not always embedded early enough in service development, sometimes becoming an “add-on” rather than a starting point
- Youth teams often rely on verbal challenge in meetings, which is effective but difficult to sustain and measure across the organisation

Recommendations

Based on the Vale of Glamorgan’s experience, the following recommendations emerge:

- Development of a clear participation framework to support consistent embedding across all directorates
- Regular reporting at senior leadership level to monitor progress and accountability
- Greater stability and sustainability in funding for participation roles and roles that have participation embedded within them.
- Clear measures of success to assess how participation is being embedded beyond youth services
- Support to better capture and evidence informal participation insights gathered through play, sports and youth work

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22. Wrexham

Wrexham is in Northeast Wales authority with major town (Wrexham), rural hinterland and strong crossborder economic ties to Cheshire.

- **Population:** approx. **136,149** (mid 2024, all ages)
- **Children 0–15:** approx. **17,878**
- **Deprivation:** Contains areas in the most deprived 10%, consistent with national distribution.

Overview

Participation within Wrexham County Borough Council is guided by a clear children's rights framework and a long-standing commitment to ensuring children and young people are listened to and involved in decisions that affect them. This commitment is set out in Wrexham's Children and Young People's Participation Strategy, which aligns participation with the UNCRC and the National Participation Standards.

Responsibility for participation sits across a range of services, including Youth and Play Services, Youth Justice, Play Development, Healthy Schools, and care-experienced participation structures. This multi-service approach supports participation across different settings, recognising that children and young people engage in different ways depending on their circumstances and experiences.

Participation Structures and Approaches

Wrexham has a well-established participation landscape, with multiple routes through which children and young people can influence decisions and shape services. Core participation structures include:

- Senedd yr Ifanc (Wrexham Youth Parliament), which provides a forum for young people to raise issues, debate priorities, and engage with decision-makers.
- Wrexham Young People's Care Council, supporting care-experienced children and young people to influence services and care planning.
- Youth and Play Services, which offer participation opportunities through youth clubs, outreach, and community-based provision.
- Play Development and Healthy Schools, embedding participation into play and school-based settings.

Participation is supported through accessible, rights-based materials and child-friendly communication, with a strong emphasis on ensuring children understand their rights and how to get involved. Impact assessments and participation standards are used as structured tools to ensure children's views inform service design and decision-making.

Embedding Participation and Children's Rights

Children's rights are explicitly embedded within Wrexham's participation strategy, with a strong focus on awareness, inclusion, and feedback. The strategy places emphasis on:

- Ensuring children and young people understand their rights and participation opportunities
- Supporting staff across services to respect and apply participation standards
- Using impact assessments to ensure children's views are considered in decisions

Participation is not treated as a one-off consultation but as an ongoing process, with mechanisms in place to show young people how their views have influenced outcomes. The authority has expressed a clear ambition to strengthen consistency and accountability in participation practice across services.

Good Practice/Highlights

Wrexham's strengths include:

- A clear, accessible Participation Strategy rooted in children's rights and national standards
- Multiple participation routes that reflect the diverse needs and experiences of children and young people
- Use of structured tools such as participation standards and impact assessments to support consistent practice
- Strong commitment to ensuring participation opportunities are inclusive, particularly for care-experienced children and those engaged through youth justice or prevention services

The authority's focus on making participation understandable and meaningful for children and young people is a notable strength.

Barriers and Challenges

Despite strong strategic intent, several challenges were identified:

- Youth Justice participation is often constrained by statutory requirements, which can limit the scope for meaningful participation. While prevention services offer more opportunities for engagement, participation within statutory youth justice contexts remains challenging.
- Resource pressures, including funding, staff capacity, time, and transport, affect the ability to sustain and widen participation, particularly for face-to-face engagement.
- National inconsistency, including the pause on the Welsh Government National Participation Kitemark, has affected local planning and delivery, creating uncertainty around expectations and progression.

These challenges reflect wider systemic pressures rather than a lack of local commitment.

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