

Oldham Children & Young People's Participation & Engagement Strategy

JULY 2010



Oldham
Partnership

1 Forward

“Participation is not a privilege and it does not have to be earned; rather it values children and young people as citizens in their own right.”

In Oldham we believe that children and young people should have a voice and influence in everything that affects them. That voice should be heard and responded to by decision makers across Oldham and influence policy making and the shaping of services.

In commending this participation and engagement strategy, as a framework for all agencies working with, or wishing to engage with, children and young people in Oldham, we support the following guiding principles derived from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC):

- Children have the right to be listened to, to freely express their views on all matters that affect them, and the right to freedom of expression, thought association and access to information.
- Measures should be put in place to encourage and facilitate their participation in accordance with their age and maturity.
- Participation should promote the best interests of the child and enhance the personal development of each child.
- All children have an equal right to participation without discrimination.
- All children have the right to be protected from manipulation, violence, abuse and exploitation.

In committing to this strategy partners across Oldham Children’s Trust and the wider Oldham Partnership will not only contribute to best practice but will support children and young people to become active citizens in a community that welcomes their contributions and values them as partners in a healthy local democracy.

2 Introduction

2.1 Background

In Oldham we believe that children and young people should have a voice and influence in everything that affects them and that the performance of services will be improved by taking account of this voice. Children and young people represent a key section within each community, with their own needs and aspirations and, importantly, with the right to express their opinions and have their views respected.

We recognise that in some cases children and young people have often been overlooked. In the past their views were not always formally taken into account as part of the democratic process. The rights of children and young people to participate in decision-making are now recognised in both international and national legislation and locally in policy and practice. Key legislation is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (UNCRC), which was ratified by the UK Government in 1991 and is often held up as the most significant factor influencing the growing interest in children and young people's participation. The Convention also sets the framework for encouraging children and young people under the age of 18 to participate in decisions affecting their lives. Article 12 states that children and young people should have the opportunity to express their views on matters that concern them and to have those views taken into account when decisions are made. Other articles address the need for children and young people to have access to information and to be free to express their opinions.

2.2 Legislative Background

Children and young people have a right to be involved and express their views in the decisions that affect them, as set out in the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. In recent times there has been a progressive shift in the legislative and policy framework relating to children and young people's participation. There are a number of duties placed on public authorities to ensure that those who use their services are involved in decision making and this of course, includes children and young people. Not an exhaustive list, the range of government policies and guidance include: *Every Child Matters 2003*, the *Child Care Act 2006*, *Children Act 2004*, *Children and Young People's Plan Regulations 2005*, *Youth Matters 2005* and *Youth Matters Next Steps 2006*, *Education and Inspection Act 2006*, *Aiming High for Young People 2007* *Public Service Agreement 14*, *Sustainable Communities Act 2007*, *NHS Act 2006* and so on. All these policies and guidance have helped the Government to embed the principles of listening and responding to young people.

3 Vision

Oldham Children's Trust overarching vision for children and young people in Oldham is:

"All children and young people in Oldham have an equal opportunity to thrive within their families and communities; and those at risk of marginalisation, exclusion and underachievement are protected and supported, particularly at times of need and transition"

This vision is underpinned by agreed and shared values to:

- strive for excellence;
- embed a focus on early intervention and prevention into the routine delivery of all services to children, young people and families;
- safeguard and protect vulnerable children within a framework of universal services to improve the well being of every child;
- narrow the gap in outcomes between the most vulnerable children and their peers;
- stretch the most able;
- consult, listen to and hear the voices of children, young people and families and provide them with opportunities to participate in decision-making;
- use evidence on outcomes for service users as the basis for improving standards and targeting resources;
- commission or deliver the right services to the right people in the right place at the right time for all children, young people and families;
- promote interaction between children and families from different backgrounds; and
- deliver excellent, integrated working across services through investing in a skilled, well trained and valued workforce.

In Oldham, *every child does matter* – even if they say something we do not like to hear, even if they ask for something that is difficult for us to deliver, even if they want to participate in an activity that has previously been controlled by adults and even if their behaviour at times is not acceptable to society.

In Oldham, we believe children and young people are entitled to:

"Be heard when decisions affecting their lives are made, or when services they rely upon are not working effectively".

We want children and young people to:

"Participate in consultation and influence decision-making opportunities within their communities, in political structures and service delivery".

4 Where we were 4 years ago

- Youth Engagement had just started to develop in a more co-ordinated and structured way.
- We had recently formed the Oldham Youth Council, professionally supported by the Empowerment and Participation Team.
- We had developed the process for the management of the Youth Opportunity Fund and the Youth Capital Fund led by Oldham Youth Council.
- Participation work was taking place in schools and in 3rd sector providers but there were no formal links to wider participation work happening across the Borough.
- We had begun to participate in regional and national opportunities for young people's active involvement.
- Young people were involved in recruitment and selection of staff and senior posts within a number of organisations – however there were differing approaches across Oldham and there was no formalised policy.
- Young people were involved in assessing Quality Assurance in a number of organisations, again these often differed in how they were delivered.
- We had a forum for Looked After Children that enabled them to influence policy and service delivery.
- There were a number of schools that had schools councils operating.
- We had an established advisory board working with young people accessing the Connexions Service, both pre and post 16.

5 Where we are now

- We have a strong, established and effective Youth Council that is regionally and nationally recognised as being a model of Good Practice.
- We have strong Children in Care Council that has established links with the mainstream Empowerment and Participation Team and that links directly to the Corporate Parenting Board.
- We have established student voice forums in all secondary and primary schools across the Borough with links into other formal children and young people's involvement networks.
- We have widened the Connexions Advisory Board remit to cover the range of targeted services

delivered by Positive Steps Oldham, including Youth Offending Service, Substance Misuse Services and Targeted Health Services.

- We now have a designated officer for the participation of children and young people with additional needs, who will develop a formal forum to enable the active involvement of this group of young people.
- We have established an AIM (Active Involvement Matters) group that consists of a number of key professionals from across all sectors that meets monthly to develop a co-ordinated approach to the active involvement of young people across Borough. The AIM Group have produced an Active Involvement Charter that will be rolled out to all those working with children and young people in the coming months.
- We have established a model for Locality Youth Forums so that young people are shaping and influencing decision making at a locality level.
- We have established an annual Children's Trust Youth Voice Event to provide young people with the opportunity to share their views, opinions and concerns around youth related issues across the Every Child Matters (ECM) framework and directly influence Oldham's Children and Young People's Plan.
- We have developed a democratic election process for the Youth Council that is run bi-annually.
- We have established the position of a Youth Mayor of Oldham based on a report initiated by young people on the Youth Council.
- We have young people involved meaningfully in the Council's Overview and Scrutiny process.
- We have the Youth Council continuing to have strong working links and relationships with senior officers within Children's Services as well as Elected Members.
- We have the Youth Council processing and directly managing a comprehensive and effective Youth Opportunities Fund, with a current budget of £322,000 per annum.
- We have an Extended Services Subsidy Grant model that ensures all spend is driven by the participation of children and young people and activities are planned to meet their individual needs.
- We have actively involved young people in the 'Your Welcome' Programme and enabled them to play a key role in quality assuring health services in Oldham for children and young people.
- We have strengthened youth engagement considerably at regional and national level with strong participation in the regional Youth Forum and the UK Youth Parliament and British Youth Council.

6 Where we want to be

- We want all children and young people in Oldham to feel that they can share their views and opinions and that adults not only listen but also act and feedback on what they have to say.
- We want all staff and volunteers working with children and young people to be committed to the meaningful participation of Children and young people.
- We want to ensure that appropriate resources are in place to enable the meaningful participation of Children and young people.
- We want to embed a culture of participation throughout the Children's Trust and the wider Oldham Partnership.
- We want to strengthen participation and involvement in recruitment and selection, quality assurance, assessment and commissioning.
- We want to commit resources to ensure the vision becomes a reality.
- A.I.M to be the delivery arm of the strategy and have clear links and support including financially to the children's trust

7 The Strategy – Key Objectives

7.1 Clear structures and processes

To have a clearly outlined structure and action plan in place so that we can effectively seek Children and Young People's views and we are able to respond appropriately and effectively.

To provide appropriate mechanisms so that Children and Young People can be involved in influencing decision making process on matters that effect their lives at service, locality, Borough wide, regional and national levels.

Through the strategy we envisage that strategic leads and senior managers of Children and young people's services will meet the needs of the needs of the Children and young people they work with by involving them in consultation, planning, development and review of Key service plans.

To establish opportunities to celebrate and promote the positive contributions that children and young people are making to their community.

To develop a process of young people's participation and involvement in recruitment and selection, quality assurance assessment and commissioning.

To commit resources to ensure the strategy is delivered effectively.

7.2 Workforce development

To equip staff and volunteers working with Children and young people to be confident and competent to deliver the strategy. Including a range of training and development opportunities.

7.3 Participation standards and principles

To adopt the Hear by rights standards across the Borough to ensure quality and effective participation.

To ensure the Equality of Opportunity for all Children and Young people in the Borough to participate including those who are deemed hardest to reach and most disadvantaged.

7.4 Skilled and confident young people

Provide Children and Young People with access to training, information and support to build their skills and confidence to participate in local, regional and national decision making.

7.5 Evaluation and review

Set out the expectation that services and agencies will be able to evidence what has changed and developed as a result of listening to children and young people.

To annually review and refresh the Strategic action plan.

8 Benefits of Participation & Engagement

8.1 Benefits for Children and Young People

- A voice and an influence for children and young people – which is their right.
- Opportunities for personal development including the development of new skills and increased confidence and self-esteem.
- Better services are created that are more responsive to the needs of the children and young people.
- Increased ability to influence the way in which local democracy works thus promoting a sustainable democratic society.
- Children and Young people develop an increased sense of ownership and belonging in the services, communities and neighbourhoods they are involved in.
- Children and Young people feel valued as equal citizens.

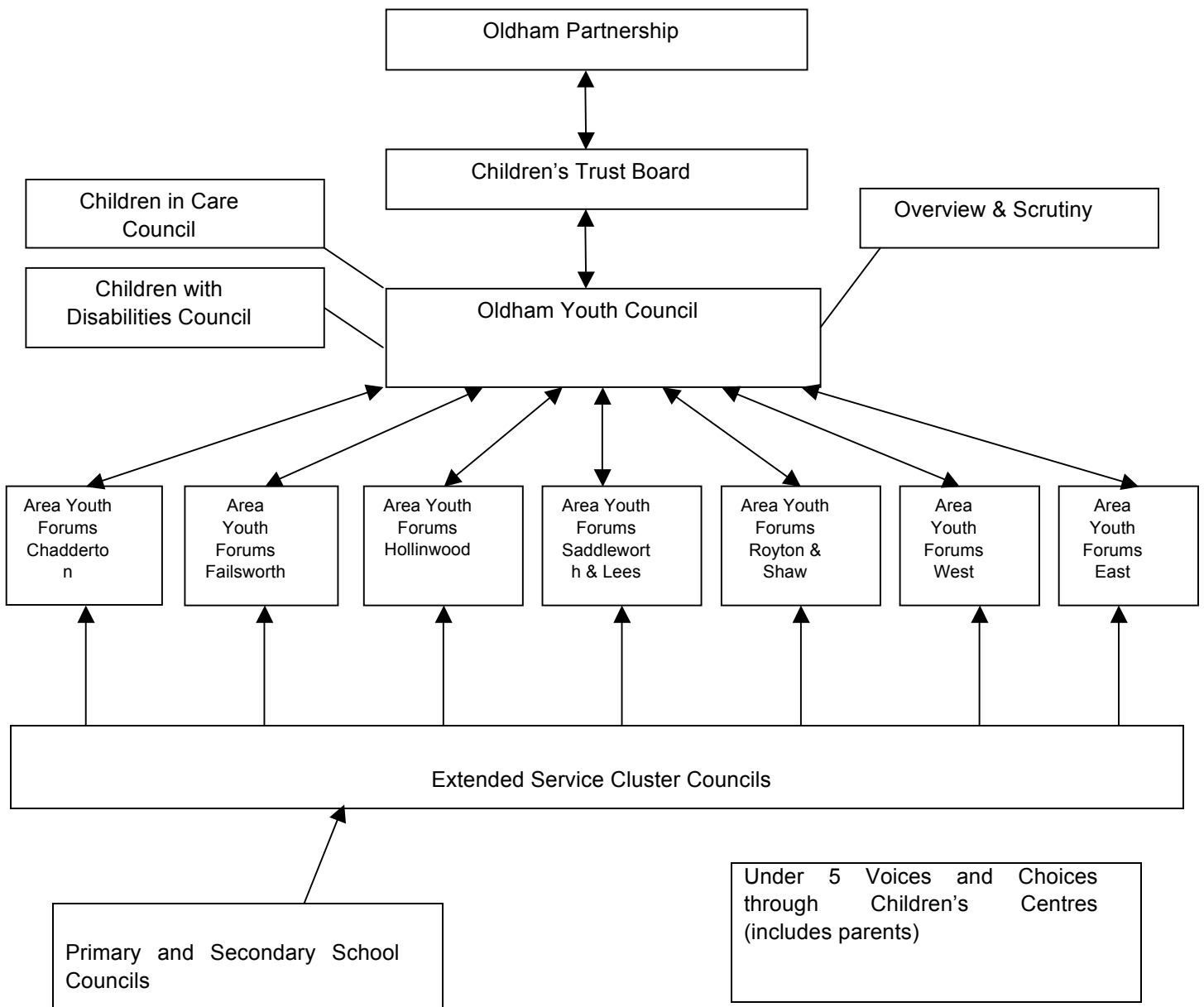
8.2 Benefits for the Organisation

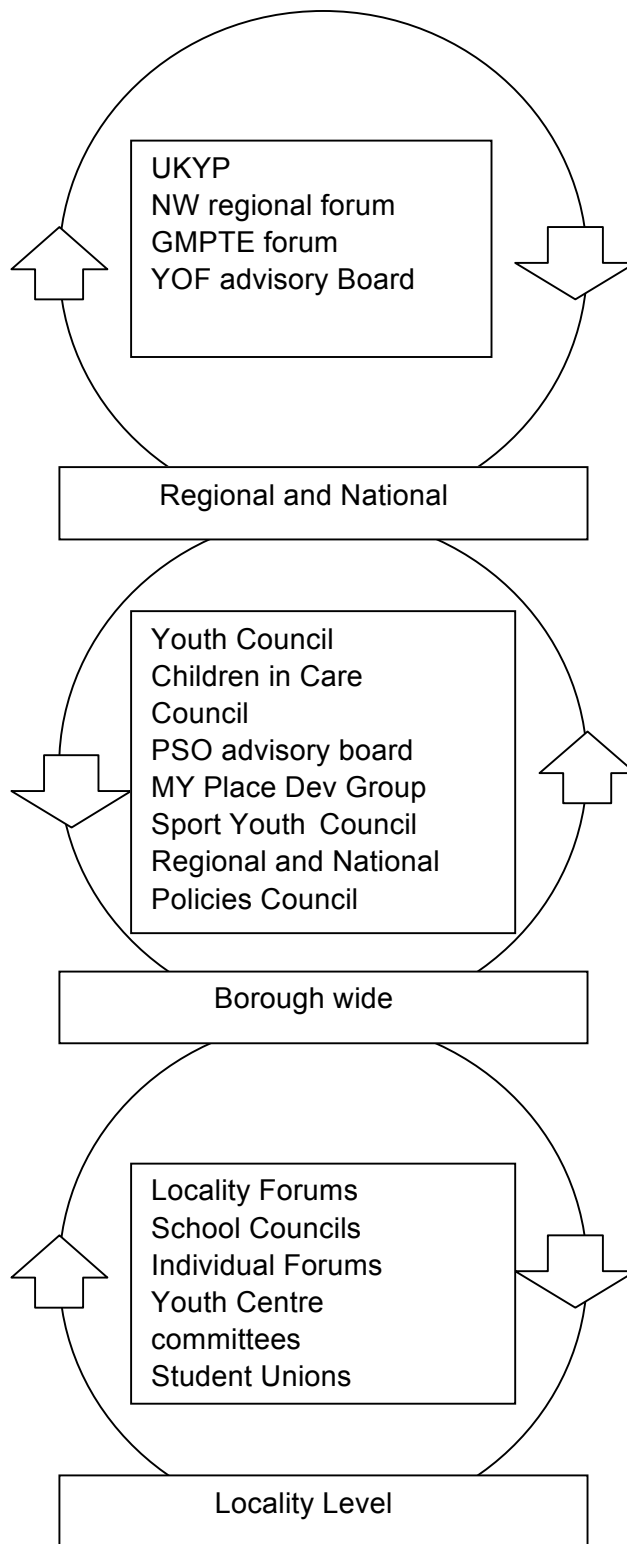
- More accountable and improved structures for decision-making.
- Better responses to the issues and concerns faced by the children and young people.
- Services and policies can be designed, delivered and evaluated based on actual rather than presumed needs.
- Children and young people can bring a fresh perspective and new ideas about services, policies and democratic processes, helping to tackle key objectives and promoting social inclusion.

8.3 Benefits for the Community

- There is a more vibrant local democracy through the active involvement of children and young people.
- Community cohesion is fostered through the inclusion of young people in local decision-making.
- Preparation of young people for engagement in local democracy.
- Children and Young people take on a more active role within their local communities.
- Children and young people develop skills and qualities that in turn are likely to prove a long term investment in the communities in which they live.

9 Line of Communication – Children’s Trust





10. References

- Aiming High for young People 2007
- Youth Matters 2005 and Youth Matters next Steps 2006
- UN Convention on rights of the Child 1989
- The Children's Act 2002
- Every Child Matters 2003
- Arnstein, S (1969), 'A ladder of citizens' participation', Journal of the American Institute of Planners, Vol 334.
- Badham, W. and Wade, H (2005 Revised Edition), 'Hear by Right – Standards for the active involvement of children and young people,' National Youth Agency.
- Hart, R (1992), 'Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship', UNICEF Research Centre.