

A diverse group of young people, including a man in the foreground with a hand on his face, are smiling and posing against a clear blue sky. The group is composed of individuals of various ethnicities and styles, creating a vibrant and inclusive atmosphere.

Annual Report 2023-2024

Hertfordshire Participation Team

Contents

Forward	01	Children in Care Council	06
Our Framework	02	Our Groups	08
Participation activities	03	Updates	10
Highlights	04	Next Steps	12



Foreword

Our aim as Hertfordshire Participation team is to ensure we listen, act, respond where possible and demonstrating a ‘you said we did’ approach.

We strive to hear the voices from all areas of our community in keeping with our Be Framework with particular attention to ensuring everyone is included.

Although an outstanding Local Authority, we never stop striving for excellence and improving our service and we recognise that the best way to do this is with the help of children, young people, parents/carers and partners sharing their views.

The participation service acknowledges that challenges over the last few years has had an impact on communities and families as well as a number of Local Authorities. Whilst we acknowledge that financial challenges has restricted some activities, we recognise the importance of providing a space for children and young people to share their views and lead on co-production..

In 2021/22 the participation team extended the remit from working primarily with Children Looked After & Care Leavers, to working across all statutory services. This has led to incredible highlights and achievements and the vision continues.

Report Prepared By
**Cheryl Grazette, Service Manager,
Participation and Family Safeguarding.**



There has been a number of global, national and localised challenges that have impacted on our Children, Young People and Families over the last few years.

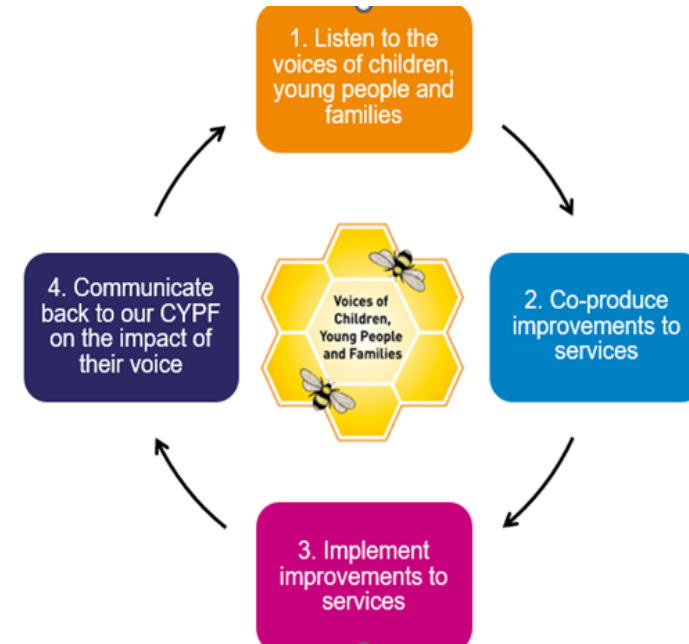
In line with our strengths-based approach and RISE values we want to ensure that we continue to build stronger relationships with Residence and continue to improve on the way we listen and learn. We are committed to co-production and working with our Children, Young People and parents to create change.



Our Framework

In 2021/2022 the Participation team expanded the scope of children and young people with whom we normally work. Initially much of participation team engagement and coproduction included primarily Children Looked After and Care Leavers through our Children in Care Council (CHICC). With the expansion of the participation team, we welcomed wider remit of engagement to include are children and young people with service experience. The participation team works across all statutory services to include all children young people with a social worker, Care Leavers and SEND.

We developed a new Voice of the Children and Young People (VoCY&F) Framework and our new journey began.



Our 4 step Voice of the Child and Young People and Families (VoCY&F), Framework, was introduced in 2021 and is now embedded within the service.

We facilitate several different Participation and Co-production groups as well as children in Care Council (CHICC),for our children and young people with Care experience.

We also facilitate groups forYoung People with service experience and parents/carer groups.



Including more voices enables us to demonstrate our commitment to our 'Be Included Bee', which was introduced as part of the Bee Framework in 2020.

The Be Included workstream which is part of our Diversity and Inclusion Board provides a measure of the work.

Our priorities to our children in care and care leavers is govern by the Hertfordshire Corporate Parenting Board.

Participation Activities

We recognise that people can participate in a number of different ways and therefore in the participation team we strive to ensure we meet the needs of all.



Participation

Participation on an Individual –

Participation can be on a one-to-one level, through calls and face to face visits. The outcome that can be achieved is changes to ones, individual experiences.

Participation at a service level –

The Participation team meet with groups of children, young people and adults. The feedback within groups can lead to changes at service level improving outcomes for Children, Young people and Parents/Carer service wide.

Participation at a Council level – Participation at council level brings together forums, boards, reviews services, plans activities and consider how money is spent. This can impact and influences changes to policy being a forum for change.



Highlights

During the last year the participation team have worked closely with our young people and have managed a number of achievements that should be celebrated.



Work around 'Our Language',

We will no longer use the term 'Case' or 'Cases' we will use 'Children or Young people assigned to (name of social worker or lead professional)



Our Language

Our Care Leavers and care experienced young people, joined with our young people with service experience to support us in looking at 'our language'.

The participation team worked with the young people to support them bringing their view and vision to life.

In November 2023, the young people presented their views at the managers forum, this was delivered to all managers, senior leader's and the Directors across all statutory services with each being asked to make a pledge of how they will ensure language is considered in their service area.



This has had a profound impact and supported the changes around how professionals record, when detailing interactions with children and young people. The work subsequently supported changes to our recording systems.

Increased Participation Activities.

Practice Week

Over the last year we have been working hard to increase participation activities with our children and young people, like many other Local Authorities we have been impacted by the financial restraints which has meant we have not been able to enjoy some of the activities with our young people however, the participation team and our young people have ensured meeting regularly remains a theme.

One way of increasing activities is during practice week. This was introduced in 2021 and involves managers and Consultant social workers reviewing practice across the service.



The main aim of Practice Week is to cultivate a culture of learning and space for practitioners to reflect on their practice and understand areas for development.

(Performance and development team)



The participation team are now responsible for gaining feedback from children, young people and families formulating outcomes reports ensuring that any themes from young people and parents are highlighted driving some any action plans.

In Hertfordshire we recognise that success is measured by the improvements and outcome to the lives of the people we support and therefore the voices of our children, young people, parents and carers are the most important. To maximise the feedback for practice week, the participation team gain all customer feedback. The number of those contacted has gradually increased with almost 100 calls being made during practice week. The feedback is reviewed, fed back to the service. Whilst we look at the areas where we continue to develop, we also take time to celebrate our 'sparkling practice' where we are doing well.

Children in Care Council

The participation team meet regularly with our Children Looked After and Care Leavers. The young people are able to meet with senior leaders after each Corporate Parenting Board meeting. This enables the young people to share their views directly with senior leaders. This change was introduced to the Corporate parenting board in 2022 and the feedback from CHICC group remains positive.

Scrutiny was also a success, chaired by our care leavers this resulted in changes within the care leavers service as mental health professionals were employed.

Hertfordshire Care Leavers Covenant 2024

Herts Care Leaver Covenant took place on Wednesday 15th May in the Ballroom at County Hall. We all joined together to celebrate Hertfordshire's commitment to uphold the principles of the care leaver covenant providing support to the care leavers. Cllr Fiona Thomson, deputy leader for children, young people and families led with an opening speech, followed by Terry Douris, Chairman of the Council and Jo Fisher, Executive Director of children services. We was inspired by our guest speaker Mark Riddell MBE, who spoke about his own personal journey through care. Alex Latham-Roberts from the covenant team joined us and spoke about the importance of covenant and how instrumental this is to our care leavers, before Richard Roberts closed the event and pictures were taken with some of our care leavers. This was an important achievement for Hertfordshire and a proud moment for Cllr Fiona Thomson who has worked hard to ensure this vision was realised. Some young people worked closely with participation team to co-produce an animation detailing what the Hertfordshire Care Leavers Covenant meant to them. This was shared during the event.



“This is Me” Tool.

Young People, supported by Child in Need and Child Protection plans worked with our CHICC to share their views around how they would like work to start with our services. They created a ‘This is Me’ a tool that helps professionals get to know them, they felt if a professional changed the new professional would have this information.

The ‘This is Me’ document is now fully working across the services. This document was co-produced with the Participation team and the children and young people. A lot of time and effort was put in to co-producing this useful tool for services and we would still like to encourage practitioner/professionals to use this document with their children and young people. The SEN service have also adopted this is me document and the Participation team have made this user friendly for them to use with their children and young people with SEN



Educational Health Care Plans (EHCP)

Currently in Hertfordshire there are over 12,000 children and young people with EHCP's. The participation team has taken on a new commitment to gain feedback from parents, carers and young people on how the plans are working for them. Over the last year the team has received feedback from approximately 506 parents' carers. To increase engagement with our young people using a survey which can be adapted to the needs of our young people, which we look forward to updating on in the next report.

This work by the participation team in gaining the voices of those with EHCP has created change, for example:

- Jonathan Jack, Inclusion and Skills Improvement Manager has outlined they are producing and embedding “a service communications protocol for all communication to be Accurate, Compassionate, Timely (ACT) –rolling out this brand across all SEND related services”.
- There will be a good standard guide to EHCPs published on the local offer for young people, parents and carers to access.

Our Groups

We continue to create a space for our young people with service experience (those children, young people supported by a social worker or Lead professional, where they currently or have been supported by a Child in Need or Child Protection Plan).

For our Children and Young People with Care Experience we have the following groups:-

Juniors Aged 10 -12, Deputies 13 -15, Seniors 16 + & Care leavers 16 – 25.

We have also recently started a group providing a space for our young people open to the Separated Migrants Team aged 18+.



New Juniors Group

Our Junior group allows children aged 10-12 who are look after, time to come together. They enjoy pizza whilst sharing their views on what is working well. The foster carer have fed back to the participation team on how much the young people enjoy this space and it reinforces to them they are not alone.



Children Services Awards

Both our Children Looked after and those with service experience had their say at our Children Services Awards last year. The young people met with the participation team to review all nominees in certain categories before choosing their winner.



Cook & Share

In December 2023 we were honoured to share a Christmas meal cooked for us all by Children and young people. The participation team were joined by Janet Jones, Interim Director of Children Services. It was a fantastic evening; the food was delicious and allowed the young people to socialise while practising their independent living skills.

The young people were pleased to receive a lovely video message from Cllr Fiona Thomson, deputy leader for children, young people and families.



Updates



Updates from professionals

Following feedback from Care Leavers over the past 12 months some significant changes have been made to the services we offer. In April 2024 we introduced Council Tax support to Care Leavers aged 18-21 years, whereby Hertfordshire County Council will pay for their Council Tax once all relevant discounts and support has been applied. In addition to this we formally became a signatory to the National Care Leaver Covenant in May 2024 and passed Care Experience as a protected characteristic within Hertfordshire, with work now taking place to embed this and change practice as a result. The biggest change that has occurred is the creation of a fourth Care Leaver Team, taking on board feedback from our Care Leavers about wanting more time with the workers. In creating this additional team, we will be able to reduce the number of young people assigned to each Lead Professional enabling increased time with Care Leavers and improved outcomes.

Samantha Jeffery – Service Manager Care Leaver Service.

Voices of our young people

“ **Harvey**

I enjoyed working with the participation team and meeting other young people. It has been nice to be part of something and share my views and ideas and see some of these come to life.

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“ **T**

Working on a number of different things has been brilliant. We have been involved in a lot over the last year, I haven't been in care long and initially felt alone but being able to meet other young people and spend time with them has been nice. I have felt my confidence grow and I feel settled and part of the group.

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Next Steps

Hertfordshire participation team wish to continue to increase engagement with Children, Young People and Families in Hertfordshire.



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Hertfordshire participation team wish to continue to increase engagement with Children, Young People and Families in Hertfordshire. We are therefore pleased to join forces with Herts Sport & Physical Activity Partnership (HSP), for a forth coming event. This will provide a space for children looked after and care leavers, as well as young people with a social worker and their parent's carers to come together to explore how physical activity can support health and wellbeing.

This will also provide an opportunity to explore career options as we will have local business providing information around training options as well as providing a space to for parents/carers to meet to share their view of children services and participate in future projects

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Our Voice Board

Our voice Board will provide an opportunity for Children Young People and Families to meet with our senior leaders, having an opportunity to discuss services as we continue to develop new ways of working.

We are looking forward to working with our Separated Migrant Children team where we will be arranging a football tournament.

Team Manager Ahmed Saliu, Service Manager Lucy Bradley will be working closely with the participation team to ensure a fun packed day.

Young DIBs

We are developing a Young Diversity and Inclusion Board. The aim if for a young people from ethnically diverse backgrounds, LGBTQ+, young people with disabilities and any other young people that wish to join to form a Young Diversity and Inclusion Board having voice in the service and supporting change and providing scrutiny and professional challenge where needed. We want to know that our service meets the needs of Child, young person and family and who better to let us know we are getting right and adhering to our Be Included Be that those we support. The Young DIB will feed into the wider, organisational diversity and inclusion board.

