



Participation Strategy

2024-27



achieving
for children

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“ All children have the right to say what they think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect them and have their opinions taken into account. ”

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

1. INTRODUCTION

This strategy has been written to enable coordinated, meaningful and consistent participation of children, young people and families across Achieving for Children (AfC).

It has also been developed to ensure that all AfC staff have a common understanding of, and approach to, participation and engagement.

The [Children's Social Care National Framework](#) (published December 2023) sets the expectations for leaders and practitioners in Children's Social Care to embed the voices of children, young people and families in the design and delivery of services. This includes putting in place clear mechanisms for children, young people and families to understand their needs, provide the right support and listen and act on any concerns raised.

Across our organisation, we already have a range of successful initiatives that enable children, young people, and their families to influence key decisions about the services that impact their lives. Building on these achievements, our new strategy sets out our approach to further amplify their voices AfC.

At the heart of this strategy are our core values of trust, empowerment, and respect - values that can only be upheld through consistent and meaningful participation.

TRUST		We are honest with you so that you understand our worries, the things that are working well and our next steps
EMPOWER		We encourage you to express your views, wishes and feelings
RESPECT		We listen to you in a non-judgemental way and take into account your wishes and feelings

This strategy applies to the whole of AfC, including both operation areas: Kingston and Richmond, and Windsor and Maidenhead. A shared strategy will enable each area to share learnings and feedback gained through different participation channels. It will also allow for the development of a shared guide to participation, joint training opportunities, and a shared bank of resources whilst also taking a localised approach to aspects of participation.

2. WHY PARTICIPATION IS IMPORTANT

What our young people say

“ Participation is important because it brings everyone closer. ”

“ It’s about everyone being equal. ”

“ Without participation, nothing will change. ”

“ It’s like sustainability - we can make a difference that’s useful for us now, and useful for other children in the future. ”

“ So children and young people are in control and it’s not others making decisions for them. ”

“ It’s about everyone getting involved. ”

Children and young people have a right to have their voices heard on matters that affect them. Legislation and principles such as Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 2009); Children’s Act 2004; Section 19 Children and Families Act 2014; Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023; National Framework for Children’s Social Care; and SEND Code of Practice 2015 highlight the statutory nature of participation.

The participation of children, young people and families brings valuable insights and lived experiences that can help shape policies, programmes and services to best meet their needs. This ensures that services are designed, delivered and evaluated based on actual rather than perceived needs.

Authentic participation, when done in a meaningful and safe manner, facilitates the development of positive and trusting relationships between us and our children, young people, and families.

3. DEFINING PARTICIPATION

At AfC, we strive to make participation meaningful so children, young people and families can directly shape and influence the services that impact their lives. We know at AfC that when children, young people and families are authentically empowered to express their perspectives and collaborate in decision making that policies and services support our communities more effectively.

‘ Participation is listening. ’

‘ Participation is getting everyone involved. ’

‘ It’s getting young people’s opinions about what they want and need. ’

‘ It’s being part of a team. ’

‘ It’s to make a difference. ’

‘ It’s our rights. ’

Types of participation

Assigned, but informed

Children are assigned to a project and may not initiate the project themselves, but they are fully informed about it (such as a school garden project). Children may still have a sense of real ownership of the project.

Consultation

The project is designed and led by the service, but children, young people, parents and carers understand the process and their opinions are gathered and treated seriously.

Co-production

This is a collaborative process where the service together with service users (in this instance children, young people, parents and carers) work in equal partnership to design, develop, deliver and evaluate services or policies. Decisions are made together with children, young people, parents and carers, ensuring their views are considered equally with adults.

Participation isn't...

Tokenism

Involving children, young people, parents and carers in a superficial manner without giving them a real influence or consideration.

Manipulation

Using children, young people and families to support an agenda without their genuine consent or understanding.

Decoration

Including children and young people in events or activities merely to make it look inclusive without valuing their input.

4. PARTICIPATION at ACHIEVING FOR CHILDREN

While we acknowledge opportunities for growth outlined in this strategy, we already have various participation groups and mechanisms in place that engage children, young people, parents, and carers with the aim of improving services that are important to them.

For me, Girls Forum has been an inclusive environment where my opinions are heard. Girls Forum has given me an opportunity to make change in a male-dominated society.

Young person, Girls Forum member

What is working well

- Participation leads and other staff members already involved in participation activity are skilled, knowledgeable and passionate about their work and participation at AfC. They bring a wealth of experience and dedication to engaging young people and families in meaningful ways.
- Digital tools such as the HaveMySay App have been embedded within AfC. This app puts children in care at the centre of their meetings and reviews by providing another way for children and young people to share their thoughts and feelings with us prior to their child in care meetings.
- Well established participation groups and forums which provide regular opportunities for children, young people, parents and carers to come together, share their views and experiences, and inform service improvements. Groups include, but are not limited to, Children in Care Council, Girls Forum, SEND Easy Read Group, Parent and Carer Consortium, Youth Council.
- Workshops are held on specific topics or service areas to gather more in-depth insights from children, young people and families. The feedback is then used to shape everything from policies and strategies to frontline service delivery.
- Regular surveys are conducted to gather feedback from wider groups of children, young people, parents and carers on their experiences, needs and ideas for improvement.
- The survey results directly feed into service reviews and development.
- Joint AfC Board and young people's meetings: Two young people from each of the existing youth voice groups from across Kingston and Richmond, and Windsor and Maidenhead attend meetings quarterly with senior leaders to discuss matters that are most important to them. Young people set the agenda for these meetings. The board members represented at the meetings feedback to the wider board. This has enabled a consistent dialogue between senior leaders and young people, ensuring that their voice is heard and valued.
- Annual events such as the Inclusion Summit and SEND Futures conference, to provide networking opportunities between parents, carers and professionals and to provide a forum in which everybody's voices are heard.

Equality, diversity and inclusion

A core principle of participation is ensuring all children, young people, parents, and carers have equal opportunities to be involved. To uphold this inclusivity, we will focus efforts on engaging groups that face greater barriers to participation or require additional support.

When planning participation activities, we will provide a range of accessible options and targeted outreach to vulnerable populations. For children and young people this includes the following.

- Children in Care
- Black, ethnic minority, and Traveller children and young people
- Unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people
- Refugee families
- Teenage parents
- Young carers
- Children with special education needs and/or disabilities
- LGBTQ+ young people
- Those affected by domestic abuse, exploitation, parental substance abuse or mental health issues

Communication methods will be tailored to improve inclusion, such as using social media, text, apps and websites for young people instead of letters or calls. How we promote participation opportunities is as vital as the activities themselves.

Offering in-person and virtual participation options expands access by allowing children, young people, parents, and carers to select involvement opportunities that best accommodate their individual situations and preferences. By proactively addressing potential barriers and diversifying participation methods, we aim to facilitate meaningful involvement from all children, families, and communities.

5. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

“ This strategy is a commitment from AfC to involve us in a meaningful way. Our views about things that impact on our lives, or that concern us, can really help to change perspectives, and make things better for all young people. ”

Chair of Kingston and Richmond Youth Council

Priority one: **Creating a consistent approach**

Participation should be considered in all of the work we do. By developing a consistent approach to participation across all three boroughs, we will be more able to place the voices of our children, young people and families at the forefront. We recognise a one-size-fits-all approach is not effective and that different activities will require varying levels of engagement. For some of our children and families, receiving information about services or any changes is enough. Others will want to be more actively involved, wanting to give their views and take part in decision-making.

There are many good examples of effective participation across AfC, through reviews, established forum and participation groups, consultations and advocacy services. We want all staff to be aware of the different methods for collecting feedback or involving children, young people and families to provide a more consistent approach across AfC, ensuring that children, young people and families have the opportunity to be involved.

Priority two: **Developing a framework for inclusive participation**

AfC is committed to promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion across all aspects of its work with children, young people, and families. We recognise that individuals have diverse backgrounds, identities, and circumstances that shape their experiences and needs. Creating tailored guidance for participation with children, young people and families from diverse backgrounds will enable more inclusive and consistent participation with all of AfC's residents.

Priority three: Sharing feedback

Those who regularly engage in participation activities, such as our participation leads, are adept at knowing what to do and how to do it effectively. By sharing knowledge and resources across the entire workforce, those less familiar with different participation processes will be upskilled, and empower staff to gain the views, wishes and feelings of our children and young people and families at all levels, making participation more accessible.

There is a wealth of feedback captured through various participation groups and engagement activities which can be relevant to one or more services. Having effective mechanisms and processes in place to enable better sharing of this information within AfC and our councils will avoid duplication of participation activities, making it more meaningful and reduce the need for children, young people and families to repeat themselves.



6. DELIVERING OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

We will develop an action plan to achieve our strategic priorities and agree on key performance indicators to monitor progress which will be reported to AfC's Corporate Leadership Team on a quarterly basis.

