



**Participation
Strategy**
Children's Services
2022 – 2025

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This is a great strategy that fully aligns with the Lundy Model of participation. I'm really pleased to see that Wigan are so dedicated to upholding their responsibility under Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The four key concepts of Space, Voice, Audience and Influence are threaded throughout the document and the commitment to deliver this strategy alongside children and young people across Wigan is very clear. Making sure children and young people are given the opportunity to provide their view, are facilitated to express their views, are listened to and their views are acted upon are all really important in participation and it's clear that this is a high priority for Wigan.

Professor Laura Lundy

Our pledge to children and young people

Participation

We promise to listen to you

We will:

- Treat you with dignity and respect whilst encouraging you to participate, listening to your views and valuing what you say
- Working together to co-produce areas that will have an impact on you
- Do what we say we are going to do and keep you informed about the influence you have had
- Use a variety of communication methods to engage with your different learning styles

We promise to find the best ways to involve you

We will:

- Give you a say over where and when we meet with you and make sure the venues are comfortable, safe, friendly and welcoming
- Make better use of social media to share information with you and ways to be involved in influencing issues that affect you, with clear examples of where this has brought about change
- Involve you in meetings that are about you whenever appropriate, making sure you are included in the meeting if you are there and not 'talked about'

We promise to surround you with the right people

We will:

- Develop a training programme for all staff working with you on participation so you're aware of your legal rights
- Routinely involve you in the recruitment of staff across Children's Services
- Recruit staff who have a passion for making things better for you

This pledge has been agreed with young people.



Councillor Jenny Bullen,
Cabinet Member for
Children and Families



CLLr Carl Sweeney
Lead Member for Youth
Opportunities and Chair of the
Corporate Parenting Board



Colette Dutton, Director of
Children and Young People's
Services, Wigan Council

1. Forewords

UK Youth Parliament Members for Wigan and Leigh

Having had the opportunity to discuss our ideas for this participation strategy as a diverse group of young people is extremely important regarding including our voices. Children and young people make up a large and active part of this borough, so it is vital that our voices are heard to bring about positive change, no matter how big or small that change is. In Wigan there are multiple platforms where passionate young people are supported to have their voices listened to and most importantly acted upon. One of these platforms is 'Wigan and Leigh Youth Cabinet', where our elected Youth MP's work in collaboration with young people across the borough and on regional and national levels. Finally, young people may be the future, but we are also the present, so we need to be involved in the decision-making processes that affect our lives.

Jack 15yrs, Alex 14yrs, Layan 16yrs, Ben 16yrs, Jacob 16yrs, Izzy 16yrs.



Members of the UK Youth Parliament with Alison McKenzie-Folan, Chief Executive, Colette Dutton, Director of Children's Services, the Mayor of Wigan, Cllr Jenny Bullen, Cabinet Member for Children and Families and Ann Clarkson, Assistant Director for Prevention, Early Help and Sufficiency (left to right back row)

Colette Dutton, Director of Childrens Services

In Wigan we want to engage children, young people and families and use their views and experiences to improve our services and their lives. We are keen to focus on co-production in the development of our services. We have systems that support participation and a workforce which is skilled, knowledgeable and passionate about ensuring the views of those using our services are not just heard but acted upon. Whilst some good participation practice is therefore evident, we also recognise there is still more to do to show it is embedded across all our work.

One of the more positive effects of the Covid-19 pandemic is that it has helped us to embrace new ways of working and develop stronger structures and processes that promote children's voice and participation. This has helped shape our **Participation Standards** which are spilt in to 6 key areas and can be found in section 4. In this next stage, we are now delighted to introduce our **Participation Strategy**. This will underpin how the council listens and responds to the views and feedback of children and young people in Wigan to achieve our vision:

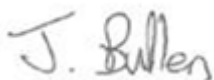
*"We want all children in Wigan to be happy, healthy and safe; to **feel listened to** and to have the maximum opportunities to be ambitious. If children or their families need help and support it should be at the **right time**, by the **right person** and in the **right place** for them"*



Colette Dutton
Director of Childrens Services

Councillors

We are pleased to introduce this Strategy as participation is central to our work with the children, young people and families of Wigan. We are committed to listening to them and taking their views into account from the beginning to achieve the best possible outcomes. Participation is very much part of our everyday service delivery and co-production is a key element. This Strategy will help us not just to act on thoughts and feelings case by case, but also to use feedback as part of ongoing service improvement and as such, forms an integral part of the Wigan Deal. I am delighted that we will continue our work to build on the strengths and resilience of our amazing children and young people as they are supported to make a meaningful contribution to service improvements.



Cllr Jenny Bullen
Cabinet Member for Children and Families



Cllr Carl Sweeney
Lead Member for Youth Opportunities

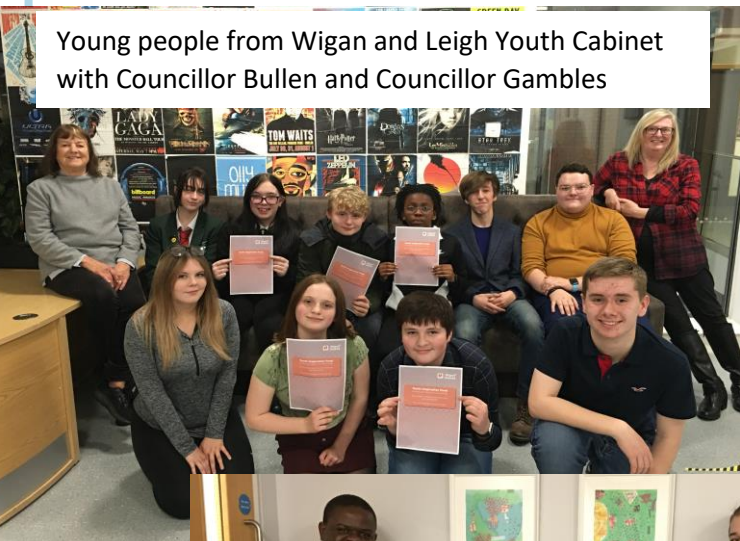
2. Introduction

Fundamentally, this strategy is about how the council will consult and engage with children and young people in Wigan to improve what is available for them. It will support a more consistent understanding and approach to participation. Most importantly, it will ensure that children and young people know what they should expect when working with us, which includes feeling heard and respected.

Children and young people have been central in helping us understand the best ways we can engage with them and how to develop this strategy. They have told us what already works well, what can work better and how they want to be worked with. We recognise we are on a journey and will need to evaluate, learn and adapt as we move forward alongside children and young people.

By creating and working to some shared principles of engagement (change to participation), through our **Engagement Model**, we will ensure our practice is more consistent and of a higher standard across Children's Services. We have **Participation Standards** that we aspire to work to which are linked to what children and young people have told us. Each team and service that works with children and young people will produce an individual **Participation Plan on a Page** with a clear, accountable action plan for the following 12-months. This is in recognition that different contexts will demand different methods and that good participation is a dynamic process, not a 'fixed' one.

Young people from Wigan and Leigh Youth Cabinet with Councillor Bullen and Councillor Gambles



Young people from Standish Community High School take part in the Big Listening Festival



Young people from the Global Friends youth group with community leader, Farai Nhakaniso

3. What do we mean by Participation, what are the benefits and what does good Participation look like?

What is participation?

Participation is ***'actively being involved in something'***. There are different ways offered to explain participation but one simple understanding covering Children's Social Care involvement in children's assessments and plans for their future, as well as important aspects of service development is:

All children and young people have the right to be involved in all decisions that affect their lives.

This is protected under Article 12 in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. As well as laws and rules there are also charters, offers, and pledges that have been made by the council that commit to listening to children. For example, The Wigan Pledge, Deal for Children and Young People, Care Leaver's Charter, Care Leaver's Offer and SEND Code of Practice.

Examples of participation

A 'You Said, We Did' document is held centrally to capture what children and young people have told us across all services and what we have done about it. A few examples are detailed below.

- Young people told us they want to participate more in their plans and meetings so we now offer greater flexibility of when we have meetings.
- Young people with special educational needs and their families said they would like to participate in different ways. More events and face to face opportunities are needed, including both daytime and evening. We supported 'SENdsational' group to provide opportunities for social activities and participation.
- A Mental Health and Me event, organized by Wigan and Leigh Youth Cabinet, gave young people the opportunity to put their views to a panel of professionals. Members of Youth Parliament also spoke in the House of Commons about the importance of engaging young people in the development of mental health services.

My social worker has been great. Kept me involved in plans and always asked what I think. Now I feel in a better place and ready to go home.



The Mental Health and Me Event

Types of participation

- ✓ **Consultation** - The project is designed and run by adults, but children and young people understand the process and their opinions are gathered and treated seriously.
- ✓ **Co-Production** - Adults, children and young people working together to influence the support and services on offer during the design, delivery and review stages.
- ✓ **Child or Young Person Initiated** - Children and young people plan and select their own activities and adults participate rather than lead on them.
- ✓ **Child or Young Person Led** - Children and young people lead on projects and events. Adults may observe and assist, but they do not interfere with the process or play a management role.



Participation is not

- ✗ **Tokenism** - Adult-led activities in which children and young people may be consulted but with minimal opportunities for feedback, or feedback is not taken seriously.
- ✗ **Direction** - Adult-led activities in which children and young people do as they are told without understanding the purpose of the activity.
- ✗ **Communication** - Just sharing information with children and young people i.e. no input.



What are the potential benefits of good participation?

Children and young people

See below from what children and young people told us when they were consulted.



Communities

- Develops more positive community relationships between children, young people and adults
- Improved sense of community and belonging
- Enhanced citizenship and political education

The Council and Partners

- Improved, better targeted and more effective services for children, young people and their families
- Better use of financial resources
- Meets government objectives and inspection processes
- More person-centred support for children, young people and their families
- User-led services so children and young people feel listened to

What does good participation look like?

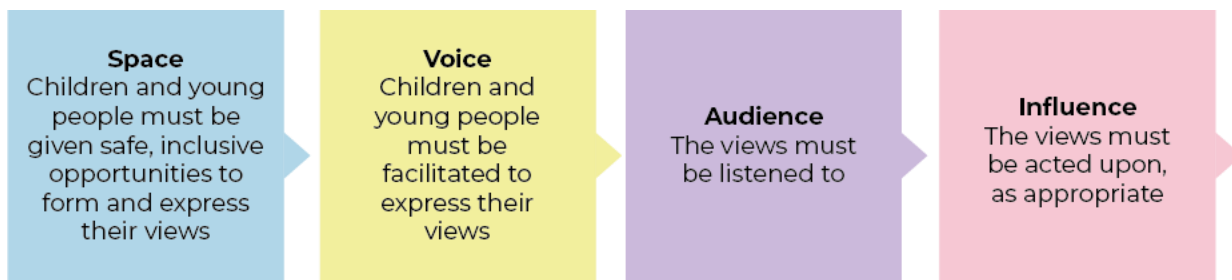
It is easy to make assumptions about what children and young people think and feel. Therefore, effective participation ensures that children and young people are actively given opportunities to be involved in decision making processes on issues which affect them. It is not simply about seeking views, but also acting on them to develop and improve what we do. This is sometimes referred to as a **'doing with us, not to us'** approach or a **'no decision about me, without me'** principle.

To us, good participation is about working together with children and young people from the beginning, on the things which are high on their agenda, not just ours. It is important to note that good participation is a voluntary activity and not all children and young people want to be involved. However, we will make every effort to encourage through using appropriate methods at suitable venues and times and making the benefits clear.

Participation Standards have been developed and are fundamental for all children and young people's services to ensure effective, meaningful engagement practices. Working with recognition of the standards guarantees a level of quality when involving children and young people in the design, delivery and evaluation of services. Gathering evidence and impact of positive change that happens as a result of children's active involvement and influence in decision making can have obvious benefits for service evaluation, monitoring and commissioning as well as for the child's own individual outcomes. A Strategy group and Community of Practice Group will oversee the participation work and will report to the Corporate Parenting Board.



The **Participation Standards**, as detailed on the next page, are aligned with our **Engagement Model** and **Evaluation Criteria** for children and young people and are categorised under the following headings, linked to a national framework¹ titled the **Lundy Model of Participation**.



What does good participation look like for children and young people?

To inform this strategy, Wigan Council commissioned consultation with children and young people. There is clear feedback that participation is very important to them and that when engaging with them they want and should expect the following:

“[We would like] patience and to not just treat us like we don’t understand things. The youth of today are probably better aware of issues than the adults”

(young person consultation feedback)

- **Listen to us, respect our voices, act upon what we say, tell us what you have done as a result of our contributions**
- **Avoid tokenism, we want our participation to be meaningful**
- **Work together from the beginning on things that are important to us**
- **Understand that we are experts at being young people, but we do need support to have our ‘voice’ heard**
- **Avoid jargon language and do what you say you are going to do**
- **Commit to training all adults working with us on participation and our legal rights**
- **Show us a plan around the level of participation agreed upon for each area**
- **Invest in the use of social media and other technologies to support better participation**

“Social media is easier and more accessible and I can share”

(young person consultation feedback)

¹ Irish National Framework for Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-Making (2021)

Participation Standards

Space

For children and young people, we will make sure:

- They are involved as early as possible and have opportunities to meet together to talk about the service and suggest improvements.
- The process is inclusive and accessible.
- They feel comfortable and safe expressing themselves.

Voice

For children and young people, we will make sure:

- They know that participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw at any time.
- They are supported to give their own views, while ensuring we include age-appropriate and accessible information.
- They are given a range of ways to express themselves that best suits their needs and choices.
- A process is created that allows them to identify topics that they want to discuss.
- They have links to local, regional and, where appropriate, national partnerships and initiatives to widen the influence children and young people can have on services for them.
- They are publicly acknowledged for their participation in the design and delivery of the service.

Audience

For children and young people, we will make sure:

- They are aware of how and when their views will be communicated and who to.
- They know we will show our commitment to being informed and influenced by their views.
- Relevant decision-makers are identified and involved.
- They are aware that when a change has been agreed, it will happen.
- They are confident we will support them to play a role in communicating their own views.

Influence

For children and young people, we will make sure:

- They are informed of the scope they have (including the limitations) to influence decision-making.
- They will be given age-appropriate and accessible feedback at key points during the development of a service or policy.
- Their views impact on decisions.
- They are given age-appropriate and accessible feedback explaining how their views were used and the reasons for the decisions taken, in a timely manner.
- They are given opportunities to evaluate the process.

4. Participation Groups and how to become involved

Children and young people have the opportunity to take part in a number of participation groups within Wigan. We are committed to having a consistent approach for involving children and young people in all areas of decision making. Young people in the various forums and groups are supported in attending all important meetings, boards and committees to ensure that their voice and the voices they are representing are taken seriously and acted upon by everyone. A **selection** of some of the groups are detailed below.

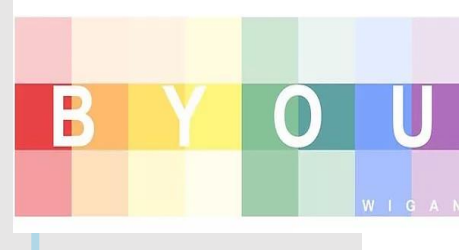
Wigan and Leigh Youth Cabinet: Wigan has a very active Youth Cabinet made up of young people elected by their peers to contribute on a local and national scale to tackling and improving the issues that matter most to Wigan children and young people. In this year's elections over 14,000 children and young people voted. The Youth Cabinet leads on the Make Your Mark campaign and uses the outcome to influence scrutiny planning. From the most recent campaign Wigan children and young people have said Health and Wellbeing (especially mental health), Jobs, Money, Homes and Opportunities and Education and Learning are the biggest issues facing them. This will influence service responses and provision moving forward.

Children in Care Council - Million Voices: Participation group for Wigan young people in care and care leavers aged 11-18. This group meets fortnightly. The young people complete induction training and interview training in addition to the group meetings. They also meet with the Corporate Parenting Board and Senior Managers in Children's Services to influence policy and practice.

Care Leavers Forum - Connected Families: Participation group for Wigan's care leavers supported by the councils leaving care team. The group meets fortnightly and has a combined peer support element to reduce any feelings of isolation. The Forum has a dedicated Participation Lead in post and their agreed priority task is to focus on a consultation with Care Leavers around emotional wellbeing and how they access support.

Wigan and Leigh Young Carers: there are participation and activity groups for children and young people with caring responsibilities.

SENdsational - Special Educational Needs and Disabilities: A participation group for young people with special educational needs and disabilities, including physical disability, learning disability and autism. They meet to look at the Special Educational Needs Local Offer and attend focus groups for consultation.



BYOU group: This is a support group for all Wigan young people under the age of 19 who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or queer (LGBTQ). The group aims to give young LGBTQ young people a voice locally, regionally, and nationally.

Global Friends: For Wigan young people from different minority ethnic backgrounds, including asylum seekers, refugees, young people from Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia and the Middle East. The group aims to give young people their say in their communities, run campaigns for change and to make a difference for other young people.



How do children and young people get involved in the participation groups?

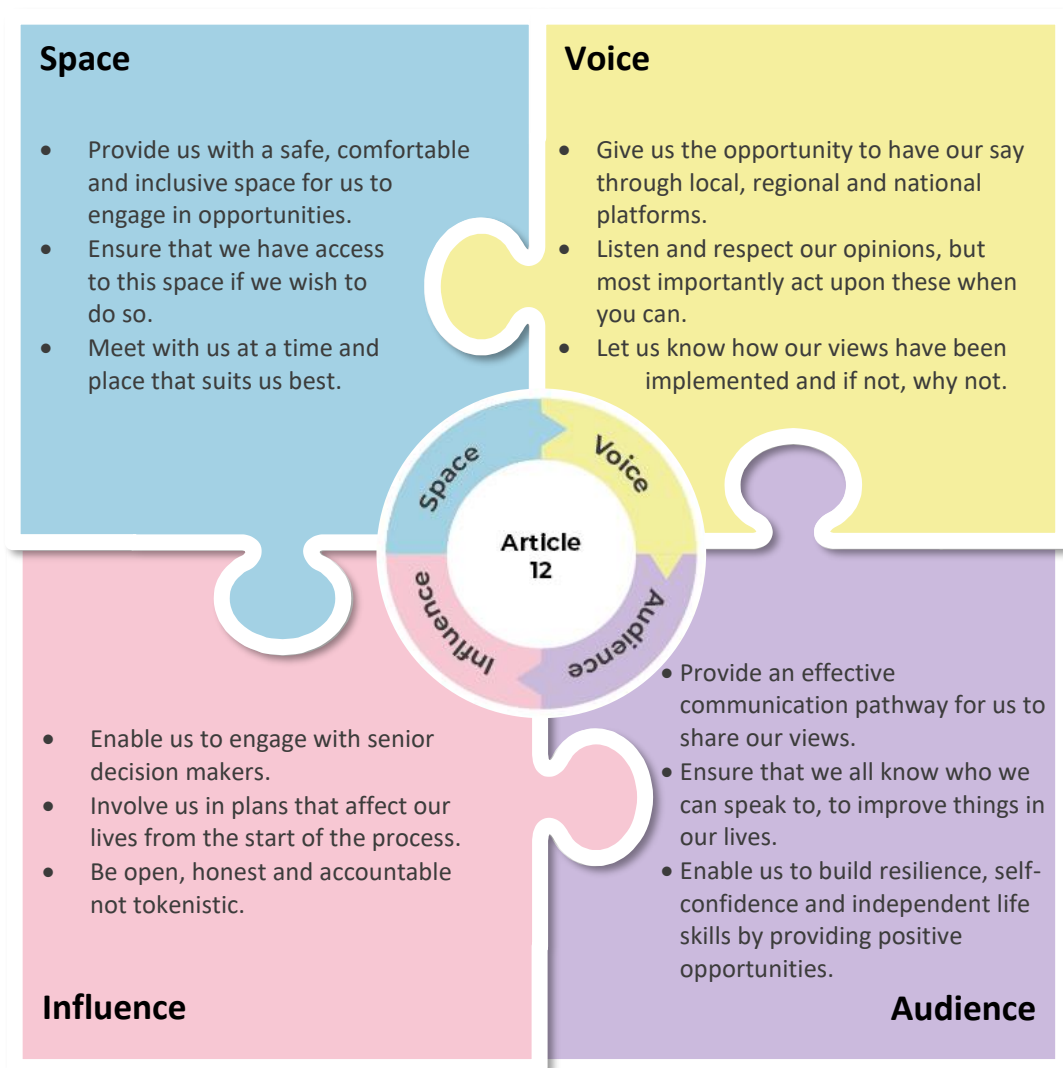
The groups above are just a selection, with a full list available on the Wigan Council website www.wigan.gov.uk/LINC2/Things-To-Do

Contact details are included if any new members wanted to join. We also work hard to engage children and young people who are not part of the groups we work with on a regular basis, such as through the *Big Listening Festival* and *Make Your Mark* which both take place across the borough.



5. Our Engagement Model

Feedback from the various groups has helped us to understand how children and young people would like to be engaged in participation work and this has shaped our underlying engagement model which links to our **Participation Standards** and **Evaluation Criteria** and is based on the national Lundy Model of Participation. This includes using appropriate venues, language and ways of working whilst providing the right support.



6. How will we know we are making a difference?

Participation Plan on a Page

As mentioned above, each team and service that works with children and young people in the council will develop their '**Participation Plan on a Page**' to show how they will ensure effective participation with children and young people over the next 12-months.

The benefits of outlining this will be that:

- There will be clearer accountability for how the voice of children and young people is gained and acted upon within distinct service areas.
- It will demonstrate that teams and services are committed to the voice of children and young people and ensuring this influences their work.

You Said, We Did

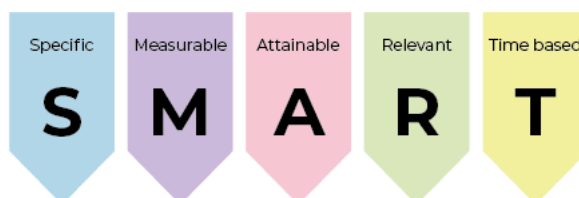
Once planned participation has taken place, we will add to our central 'You Said, We Did' document which will capture what children and young people have said and what we have done about it, over a 12 month period from April to March, to hold ourselves accountable to children and young people and ensure we are making a difference.

Evaluation Criteria

We will ask children and young people to provide feedback in line with our **Engagement Model** and **Participation Standards** around the four key areas of Space, Voice, Influence and Audience.

Measures

Using SMART measures, we will look at what information we can capture so we know we are making a difference. For example, our aspirations around participation include:



- Each service within Children and Families to produce at least 3 Participation actions over a 12 month period and incorporate them in the Participation Plan on a Page.
- Apply for a kitemark participation standard, such as through Investing in Children.
- Review feedback from children and young people and the actions taken as a consequence twice a year through the 'You Said, We Did' document at the Strategy Group and Community of Practice.
- Share with children and young people what we feel has been achieved after participation has taken place and check this fits with what they think.
- Produce an annual report to highlight what has been achieved and what the plans are for the next year, incorporating case studies to capture individual stories of quality participation.
- Develop an agreed dataset to measure what's working well and what areas need more attention.
- Develop and implement a staff training model for participation with 10 staff being trained as well as 10 young people per-year.
- Develop and agree a dedicated budget to support effective participation and delivery of this strategy.

Children and young people will be able to say ...

I am encouraged to participate, I am listened to and what I have to say is heard, my voice is valued, changes are made as a result of what I have to say and I understand how my contribution makes a difference.

Thank you!

Thank you to all of the young people who have been part of the consultation and co-design of Wigan's Participation Strategy for 2022-2025.

Thank you to Laura Lundy who created the Lundy Model of Participation which is used throughout this strategy and for providing an endorsement.

Thank you to all of our national, regional and local partners, who help to support our children and young people with participation in Wigan Borough, including the following organisations:

- British Youth Council
- Youth Focus North West
- UK Youth Parliament
- Proud Trust
- Lancashire Wild Life Trust
- Royal Horticultural Society
- People's History Museum
- Greater Manchester Combined Authority
- Leigh Archives
- CCG
- Health Watch
- Yellow Jigsaw
- BBC Young Reporters
- The Climate Coalition
- Pride Committee
- Tandem Theatre
- We are with You
- Wigan Family Welfare
- Wigan Athletic
- Wigan Youth Zone
- Embrace
- Coram Voice
- Culture Unlocked - Wigan and Leigh's Cultural Education Partnership
- Greater Sport