

***Children & Young People's Participation:
A Statement of Commitment***

Brent Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Board

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1. Introduction

This Statement of Commitment seeks to ensure that children, young people and their families living in Brent participate and are involved in the development, structure, delivery and evaluation of services they use. It outlines the principles and shared values within which all statutory and voluntary agencies will work and a clear vision and process of how these will be achieved.

A range of guidance documents have informed this Statement of Commitment including; government guidance, the National Youth Agency, the Local Government Association and the Carnegie Young People's Initiative.

1.1 Brent Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Board

The remit of the Brent Children and Young People's Partnership Board is to ensure that every stakeholder is engaged at its most senior level and actively supports the delivery of a local strategic plan for services for children and young people. It is the fundamental driving force for change, empowered and enabled to achieve real transformations at the same time as adopting policies and strategies informed by children, their families and communities.

Membership of the Board includes Chief Officers from the tPCT, Acute Trust, Mental Health Trust, Police Probation Service, College of North West London and the Learning & Skills Council. Lead members from Brent Council, schools and the voluntary sector are also represented on the Board.

1.2 The 'Hear By Right' Standards

The Brent Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Board agree to adopt the 'Hear by Right' standards a model developed by the National Youth Agency for good practice for children and young people's participation. Adopting this model will embed the participation of children and young people in the design, delivery and evaluation of services. The *Hear by Right* standards are detailed below:

Standards	Detail	Implications for Each Agency
Shared values	A charter of shared values is agreed with partner organisations and used to set policy and review performance of services.	All agencies to sign up to the principles and standards of this Statement of Commitment
Strategy	Children and young people take an equal part in reviewing strategic plans.	To involve Children young people and families in the planning, commissioning, delivery and evaluation of services.

Structures	Children and young people are joint partners in decision making and scrutiny structures on issues affecting them	To ensure that there are adequate resources to make participation and consultation real for children and young people in Brent and that outcomes are effective.
Systems	Children, young people, staff and elected members evaluate regularly children's active involvement. Systems in place can track successful progress and changes back to the involvement of children and young people.	To improve decision making, participation leads to more accurate, relevant decisions which are better informed.
Staff elected members and Trustees	Staff are trained and inducted in involving children and young people and established support for elected members in their work on active involvement.	To enhance the democratic processes – Representative democracy can be strengthened as children gain new opportunities and are helped to become active members of the community
Skills and knowledge	Children and Young People help plan, deliver and evaluate active involvement training to staff, members and partners.	To enhance children's Skills – Participation helps in developing skills useful for debate, communication, negotiation, prioritisation and decision making and to empower and enhance self esteem.
Style of leadership	The organisation demonstrates an open style of leadership, collaboration and shared objectives with partner organisations. Children and young people hold the organisation to account and have a key role in scrutiny processes.	To ensure participation is inclusive and improve access to the democratic process for all children and young people.

The 'Hear by Right' Standards Framework

The diagram below show the *Hear by Right* Standards Framework.



2. Why We Should Involve Children and Young People

Apart from the legal requirements for children and young people participation, research from the National Children's Bureau, National Youth Agency, Carnegie Young people's initiative, The Children and Young People's Unit and Save the Children have undertaken research in this area as well as a number of reports published by the Government's Social inclusion Unit have outlined some of the key benefits of children and young people's participation as follows:

- Giving children and young people an active say in how polices and services are developed, provided and evaluated leads to more effective targeting of services which meets their needs.
- Being involved in decision making processes is a means of showing children and young people that they are being valued as young citizens and foster better local democracy and effective citizenship.

- Provides an opportunity for socially excluded children and young people to be involved.
- Young people can learn about themselves and others and about exercising social responsibility.
- Young people have the opportunity to learn new skills and increase knowledge. This would enable them to make positive contribution to the communities in which they live.
- Provide user information for on-going assessment, monitoring and evaluation of local services.
- Encourages inclusion in participation of a range of children and young people.
- Improve access to the democratic processes for children and young people, including vulnerable young people and those with special needs.

3. Participation Vision and Principles

Participation Vision

CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR FAMILIES LIVING IN BRENT ARE GIVEN AN OPPORTUNITY TO INFLUENCE SERVICES THEY RECEIVE BY PARTICIPATING IN THE PLANNING, COMMISSIONING, DELIVERY AND EVALUATION OF SERVICES.

Principles for the Participation of Children and Young People

We believe that services will be more effective, better targeted and received when children young people and families are consulted and participate in the planning, commissioning, delivery and evaluation of services. We have adopted the 'Hear by Rights' shared values and good practice for children's participation as our principles. These principles will be inclusive of all children and young people.

- The active involvement of children and young people is a central commitment of the statutory and voluntary agencies providing services for children and young people.
- We value and respect the involvement and views of children and young people.
- Children and Young People will receive feedback about their participation and how their views link to the decision making process.

- All policies and standards developed for the participation of children and young people will be evaluated and continuously improved using the '*Hear by Right*' standards.
- We will ensure resources are made available to enable effective consultation and participation with children and young people.

4. National and Local Context

This Statement of Commitment has been developed taking into account the legal context, statutory requirements and a number of the national and local context

4.1 National Context

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Article (12) of the UN Convention states that 'Children have a right to express their views on anything that affects them and for those views to be listened to'.

Learning to Listen (2001)DFES

Promoting citizenship and social inclusion is already an important part of the Government's agenda. In Learning to Listen (2001) DfES: Core Principles for the Involvement of Children and Young People. The Government set out its commitment to children and young people's participation in the design, provision and evaluation of services they use and laid down a requirement that all government departments produce action plans for the promotion of children and young people's involvement within their departments.

The Children Act 2004 and five Outcomes

The Children Act 2004 is the legislative spine for developing effective and accessible services focused on the needs of children, young people and families. The Act places a new duty on statutory agencies providing services for children, to co-operate with arrangements, which will improve the well-being of all children.

In terms of delivering a fully integrated service, the Act identifies five priority outcomes for children and families – these are:

- being healthy
- staying safe
- enjoying and achieving
- making a positive contribution
- economic well-being

The National Service Framework for Children and Maternity Services (NSF).

The National Health Service Framework set out the standards for the delivery of health and social care services for children and pregnant women. The key theme of the framework is the importance of integrated working between health and social care agencies to support children and young people and improve their quality of life and life chances.

The key objectives of the NSF are;

- To put children and their families at the centre of care
- To develop effective partnership working so that needs of children and young people are always considered.
- To deliver needs-led services

In meeting these objectives it is acknowledged in the framework that the active participation of children, young people and carers in the design and development of services needs to take place.

The Connexions Strategy (2000)

The key principles of the Connexions Strategy include taking account of the views of young people and the inclusion of all young people in consultation activities and community and involvement.

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998

The Home Officer guidance in relation to this Act, stresses the importance of involving children and young people in the process of reducing local crime and disorder.

Best Value and the Local Government Act 1999

The local Government Act 1999 requires authorities to consult with their local community as part of their Best Value reviews. There is an explicit expectation that children and young people will be included in consultation.

Children Act 1984

It is a requirement under the Children Act 1984, that Social Workers seek the views of children and their families as part of the assessment process.

4.2 Local Context

Demographics

Brent is one of the most diverse boroughs in London with a total of 59,569 children and young people age 0-18.

- 73% of pupils in Brent are from ethnic minority communities, with over 130 different languages being spoken.
- A growing proportion of children are from refugee, asylum seeking and economic migrant families with 4 in 10 children in year six being in a different school from the one they attended in year one.
- One third of residents are under 16 compared with a fifth in London generally.
- Nearly one third of Brent's children are in receipt of free school meals and the proportion is rising.
- Infant mortality in the five most deprived wards in Brent is significantly above the national average levels.
- 2004 educational achievement in Brent primary schools are as follows;

Key stage 1 (age 5-7) results remain below the national average; girls out perform boys in all subjects; Asian or Asian British, Pakistani, Black or Black British and African Pupils achieve below the Brent average.

Key stage2 (age 7-11) Pupils perform at the national average in English and Maths; girls outperform boys in all subjects; highest attaining groups are White British, Asian or Asian British and Indian. Asian or Asian British, Pakistani, Black or Black British, African & Caribbean pupils perform below the Brent average.

- The percentage of children being looked after by the council is 0.67% of all children and young people in the borough.
- 9.4% of young people under 20 years old in the borough are unemployed, this rises to 30% in the five most deprived wards of the borough.

In light of the above statistics it is crucial that the statutory, voluntary and private agencies place a strong emphasis on the involvement of children, young people and their families in local planning and delivery of services.

Brent Council's Corporate Strategy

Brent's Corporate Strategy; Building a Better Borough: Our Corporate Strategy 2002-6

One of the five cross cutting themes which supports the council's vision and priorities is to support children and young people.

Current Participation and Consultation of Children and Young People In Brent.

The council and its partner agencies have a strong record of participation, involvement and consultation with children and young people through the following services and forums;

- Brent Youth and ConneXions Service
- Children's' Forum
- Brent Children's Fund
- Citizenship Education and schools councils
- Youth Involvement in Local Democracy week 2004
- Brent Youth Partnership
- Service User Consultative and Area Forums

A mapping exercise to analyse recent consultation and participation activities undertaken by the council and partner agencies listed showed that there needs to be more joined up focussed work to ensure that the results from consultation activities inform strategies and plans, and are evaluated to ensure that improvements are made to services delivered to children and young people. The analysis also indicated that specific groups of children and young people are not been included in the participation and consultation process.

Groups of children and young people identified who need to be engaged more are for example:

- Disabled children and young people
- Young asylum seekers and refugees
- Children and young people in social housing.
- Young people not in education Training or employment

5. Next Steps

Each partnership organisation embraces the principles and objectives of this Statement of Commitment and develops a strategy/action plan giving due consideration to key areas where children and young people could participate and be actively involved in service planning and delivery. Some examples of , the ways in which children and young people may be encouraged to participate include:

- Board, management and governor youth representatives
- Youth Forums/ Parliaments
- Schools councils
- Social Action Groups
- Whole group meetings (considering options for different service delivery models)
- Project/research
- Conferences /presentations
- Recruitment panels and staff training
- Evaluation/reviews