



Participation Strategy 2024-2027



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Introduction

Our **vision** is that Middlesbrough will be a local authority which will empower all children, young people and families to participate in decisions that affect their lives. Services will be shaped by our children, young people and families to ensure we are meeting their needs effectively.

Our **values and behaviours** are the thread that runs through all the work we do with young people. Middlesbrough Council follows a 'One Children's Services' approach. We all work together to deliver on our mission, strive towards our vision, and we always keep our values and behaviours in mind. Below is how we, as a participation team, the whole children's services, and wider council services will use our values to deliver on our vision and strategic priorities.



1. Passionate

- a. Treat children I work with like those in my family
- b. To show love even if children don't yet know how to accept it
- c. Nurture and value our colleagues so that they are able to nurture and value children



2. Integrity

- a. Adapt to the needs of families respecting their race, disability, cultural and religious beliefs
- b. Speak for those who can't speak for themselves
- c. Be honest with children even if it is difficult



3. Creative

- a. Use the communication methods used by children
- b. Purposefully seek resources when children need them
- c. Show children the best sides of themselves so they can grow to recognise and develop them



4. Collaborative

- a. Being approachable so people can collaborate
- b. Give children time to build trusting relationships with their workers
- c. Show our colleagues the value we want them to show others



5. Focussed

- a. Be a role model
- b. Make learning exciting and an integrated part of working life
- c. Develop my understanding of cultures within Middlesbrough focusing on race, disability, cultural and religious beliefs they have

Introduction

Middlesbrough Council is committed to engaging and hearing directly from parents, carers and young people to ensure services develop to meet needs. The Council engages with their customers in a variety of different ways.

Example from Early Help (Stronger Families)

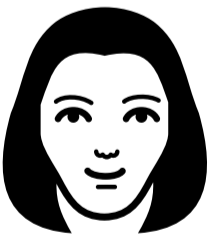
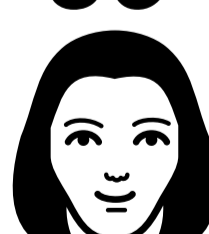
When a family has been supported by this team and their support is due to come to an end, someone who is independent, will contact the family to seek feedback on the support received and find out if there is anything we could do better.

The questions we ask were devised by young people, so that we can make sure we are seeking feedback from children and young people (and not just parent/carers) and it's called Phoebe's Pathway.

Families individual feedback is looked at by those who have supported the family and if they have told us something we could have done better, we will act on this and tell the family what we will do.

We use all the feedback from our families, to help us positively develop our services ensuring we meet their needs.

Some of the things our families have said

"The service was amazing.  was a huge moral Support. Always called when she said she would or as soon as possible. Always there to listen to. Helped my son into Middlesbrough foundation which he is loving and is so much better at home. Helped me to get onto a course I couldn't have done it without  help."

"The service has helped both Mum and G with difficulties getting G into school. This has been the biggest help for both of them".

Foreword

Middlesbrough Youth Council

'Young people want their voices to be heard. Middlesbrough Children Matter gives young people the opportunity to express their opinions freely without fear of judgement. Youth participation is essential to creating a brighter, better future. This strategy addresses the tactics and motivations for Participation in Middlesbrough. It's all you need to know about participation in Middlesbrough Council.'



Benefits of Engagement

Young People

"It gives us opportunities to help out in the community on behalf of young people."

"I love getting involved because not only does it help my community but also opens doors for me in the future."

"Educates me on the current issues and how I can do my part to help."

"It enables us to have a voice to be heard, something which is extremely valuable."

"Youth voice groups provides platforms for young people to effectively articulate their perspectives. Their voices are not only heard but creates positive changes."

Parents and Carers

"Your voice possesses incredible power, capable of effecting change, motivating others, and leaving a lasting impact on the world."

Benefits of Engagement

Benefits to Services

There are many services that impact on young people, families and communities. That is why it is so important they hear directly on what is working well, what people struggle with and what developments they would like to see made to have their needs met.

The benefits are:

- They will be fit for purpose
- They will be accessible
- They will be inclusive

Benefits to Communities

Working with young people, parents and carers to improve things in their area will:

- Increase a greater sense of belonging to their communities
- Enable those with lived experiences to have a voice and be heard
- Ensures voices from all communities are heard
- Projects our young people, parent and carers create will benefit the community
- Young people and families are more likely to stay in their hometown

Benefits to the National Agenda

We aim to make sure that our young people, parents and carers' voices and opinions are heard as widely as possible. We get involved in national projects to do just this! Some benefits of this are:

- By listening to young people/parents and carers around the country, government organisations are given the information they need to make informed decisions
- Our young people, parents and carers influencing national decisions

Participation Check List

When we work with our young people, parents and carers, we make sure that we have everything in place for meaningful participation.



People must "...understand that Participation is not a gift, but something that they have to do". Laura Lundy

We follow Lundy's Model Of Participation



We are huge fans of co-production between young people/families and senior leaders and will always encourage young people and families to work directly with those who have the power to influence service areas.

Governance

Our young people, parents and carers feed into...

Family Help Board



SEND & Inclusion Strategic Meeting

You Matter to Us (Corporate Parenting Board)



This strategy supports

1/ Young people across Middlesbrough

Key drivers:

Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities on Service and Activities to Improve Young People's Well-being, September 2023 states 'Local authorities must have regard to this guidance when exercising their statutory duty to secure, so far as reasonably practicable, leisure-time activities and facilities for young people aged 13 to 19 and those with learning difficulties or disabilities aged 20 to 24'

The British Youth Council states ' Local youth councils are forums that represent the views of young people at a local level. Run by young people for young people, they give young people a voice and enable them to make their views heard in the decision-making process'

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1992 - 'the right to health, education, family life, play and recreation, an adequate standard of living and to be protected from abuse and harm'.

Key achievements:

- The youth council meets on a fortnightly basis and is a group for young people across Middlesbrough aged between 13-19 years.
- They have all signed up to be Middlesbrough Volunteers.
- They design and deliver workshops at the annual Headstart Conference.
- They have been involved in the development of the Early Help strategy.
- They feed their findings from engagement events into the Children's Trust Board.



2/ Cared for young people

Key drivers:

- **The Children Act 1989** requires that *'before making any decision about a looked after child a local authority must give due consideration to the child's wishes and feelings, having regard to their age and understanding'*
- **Care Matters (DfESa, 2006a,2007)** *'expects all councils to have a Children in Care Council to ensure that there is a formal mechanism for children's views to be heard'*
- **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child - Article 12** says *'every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously'*.

Key achievements:

- **'We Matter'** group (for young people who are looked after in foster care and residential care between the ages of 11-16 years) meets every fortnight. They come together, tell us what they would like to change to improve their experiences and have fun.
- The Independent Reviewing Officer team asked them how they could better support young people to be part of their meetings. Following this engagement Cared for young people are now routinely asked how they would want their meeting held and how they would like a greater role within the meeting.
- The Executive Director for Children's Services and Children's Director visited their group and heard what was important to them.
- During an engagement event with their Corporate Parents, young people said they wanted to be more prepared for independent living. An ASDAN accredited workbook is being developed to enable all secondary school aged cared for and care experienced young people to work through, to be better prepared to succeed independent living
- They have developed a 'You Matter' pack to be given to all young people who become looked after
- They hold their annual football event for all care experienced young people
- They design and deliver their annual Christmas and Halloween events

3/ Care Experienced Young People

Key drivers:

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduces 'corporate parenting principles, which comprise of seven needs that local authorities in England must have regard to whenever they exercise a function in relation to looked-after children or care leavers'

- *to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of those children and young people*
- *to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings*
- *to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people*
- *to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners*
- *to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people*
- *for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and*
- *to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.*

Key achievements:

- A monthly 'Voice, Influence and Change' group was created by care experienced young adults for their peers between the ages of 16-25 years, to come together have a voice, create events and influence positive changes to services.
- Members of this group are part of the Regional Children in Care Council and have attended the annual residential, Regional conference and other regional events
- Members of this group, other care experienced young people and 'We Matter' met their Corporate Parents and 15 Pledges were made. The Executive Children's Director's Pledge was to have young people deliver communication training for Managers, Social Workers, and Personal Advisors. The group developed and delivered the training and staff identified they had learnt more about young people's experiences and that they will change their support to meet young people's need.

3/ Care Experienced Young People - Continued

Key achievements:

- The Care Ambassadors volunteer with the participation team to support the wider engagement work
- Care experienced adults are involved in the training for potential foster carers, foster carer and social care staff recruitment and are part of the foster carer panel
- A Care Ambassador has worked with the Voice, Influence and Change group, 'We Matter' and the fostering support group to develop a 'My Journey to Independence' ASDAN accredited programme, for all cared for and care experienced young people

4/ Young people with Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Key drivers:

- **The Children and Families Act 2014, the Care Act 2014 and the Single Equalities Act 2010 together identify: *'All children and young people are encouraged to make decisions about their future, their support and to participate in designing services'***
- **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child - Article 26 - *'to enable persons with disabilities to attain and maintain maximum independence, full physical, mental, social and vocational ability, and full inclusion and participation in all aspects of life'***
- **Middlesbrough SEND and Inclusion Board, one of the priorities is: *'To ensure greater involvement of children, young people and families to support coproduction and ensure that their voice is heard regarding the services and support they need'***

Key achievements:

- **Nine educational settings visited on a monthly basis to engage with their students. Over 80 students are actively engaged.**
- **Students co-produced and delivered the 2024 'My Voice Matters' Conference.**
- **Students from Discovery school said they wanted to have their own page on their school website. This was developed.**
- **Students from two settings were invited to a celebration event, to display their experiences of being part of the OFSTED inspection and participation engagement. Two students presented at the event.**
- **Representatives from each setting met with members of the SEND and Inclusion Strategic meeting, to tell them about their school, their engagement work and how to improve their post 16 Transition. The managers' reported positively about meeting the young people as they heard directly about their experiences. The students report that they feel listened to and feel empowered that they have met important people.**

5/ Family Hub Community Champions

Key drivers:

Middlesbrough Council received funding from the Department For Education to develop Family Hubs. One requirement was to establish Parent and Carer Panels, where expectant parents, parent and carers of children aged two years will come together and have shape the developments of services to improve their experiences together with local service commissioners to co-design and evaluate services.

Key achievements:

- Over 80 parents/carers have had a voice about the newly established Family hubs
- One parent attended the Regional Parent/Carer celebration event
- Parents/carers have been involved developing the new 'Community Conversation' project to engage with 20 parent/carers groups across Middlesbrough
- They attend the engagement workstream meeting and update services on what parents/carers are saying

Promoting Engagement

1. We recruit volunteers through a variety of methods

- Work with internal and external partners/organisations to promote the groups and volunteering opportunities
- Attend meetings to talk about the groups
- Share information on social media - Facebook, Twitter and Instagram
- Host events to encourage people to sign up to our groups
- Link with other youth providers in the area
- Link in with specialist services in the area

2. Keeping people involved:

- Setting them up as Middlesbrough Volunteers
- Giving young people opportunities to be Care Ambassadors
- Reimbursement of travel costs
- Having social events
- Giving vouchers for doing extra activities- Training, speaking at conferences, events and interviewing
- Refreshments/food at meetings
- Recognising all of the time and effort our volunteers put into the group and celebrating their achievements
- Training

3. Promoting and Celebrating:

- Supporting our volunteers to speak directly to decision makers and having them linked directly into the decision making Boards
- Share their work through regular reports into meetings
- Share positive stories about their achievements with the Middlesbrough Council Communications Team to put on their social networks
- Social media (Middlesbrough Children Matter Twitter, Instagram)
- Internal newsletters/bulletins
- Word of mouth from our volunteers
- Social events

Making a Difference

To know if we are making a difference, we measure the impact that our work is having. We do this through lots of different ways:

The Groups

- Create work plans together
- Check in with groups members for their feedback
- Reflection on the sessions
- Projects are co-produced with senior leaders and they can evidence the impact they are having
- Volunteers continue to come to our sessions and are enjoying themselves
- Service providers come to us and ask to work with young people
- Supporting the groups to monitor service areas progress

On a Strategic Level

- Every service provider to understand the importance of working with their customers to co develop and create services
- To ensure that all services respond to what their customers are saying we created a 'You Said, We Will, We Did' document. This tool is for everyone to record what their customers are saying, identify what they will do as a response and report on what they have done! The tool then requires services to report and provide evidence on the outcomes and impact their work has had.



Our plans for 2024-2027

Youth Council will:

- Continue to meet once a fortnight
- Have three annual campaigns running from September to July
- Make greater links with the Middlesbrough Youth Mutual
- Sign up all new members to become Middlesbrough Volunteers
- Increase youth voice by holding two engagement events each year
- Design and deliver a workshop at the annual HeadStart conference
- Have an annual 'Big Takeover'
- Engage with primary school students to capture their voice
- Increase their involvement with the Children's Trust Board and other Boards
- Increase their involvement being part of interview panels and advisory boards
- Work with the Commissioning service to create opportunities for young people to become Young Commissioners

'We Matter' will:

- Continue to meet once a fortnight
- Increase membership by working with with Children Looked After teams, Independent Reviewing service, Residential, Fostering and Pathways to increase membership
- Increase cared for voice by holding three engagement events every year for foster families to come together
- Explore with their older peers on using emails/WhatsApp's/Text to reach more cared for and care experienced young people
- Design and deliver an annual celebration event for all cared for young people
- Be part of the fostering service recruitment, skills to foster training and sit on fostering panels
- Engage with foster children, children who foster so their voice is captured within foster carer reviews and engage with foster carers birth children
- Ask all young people in residential care a 'tell us' question every month
- Increase the number of young people from residential care to attend the group
- Increase the number of Care Ambassadors to include younger care experienced young people
- Sign up new members of the group to become Middlesbrough Volunteers
- Hold an annual football event

Our plans for 2024-2027

Voice, Influence and Change will:

- Continue to meet every month
- Work with Children looked after teams, Independent Reviewing service, residential, fostering and Pathways to increase membership
- Create, launch and include this within their training, a positive list of words that all professionals should use when working with young people
- Develop and Deliver the 'My Journey to Independence' ASDAN accredited programme to cared for and care experienced young people.
- Co Design with Pathways three fun engagement events for older care experienced young adults
- Co design with Pathways several 'Open Day' events for young people about to be supported by Pathways, to hear from Social Workers and Personal Advisors about the support they will get
- Co produce with Pathways - Building positive relationships with family and Lifelong links
- Support Pathways to regularly communicate with their young people telling them about new opportunities and events
- Hold an annual Celebration event for older care experienced young adults
- Work with 'We Matter to have the 'You Matter' pack available for all young people who become looked after in place and monitor
- Work with the Virtual school to explore the impact of PROCLAIM on students to support further programme design
- Work with the Virtual school to analyse Student Voice in Personal Education Plans to support systematic change within education

Our plans for 2024-2027

'Voice, Influence and Change' will:

- Ensure young people interview panels are in place for more posts within Children's services
- Design and deliver six training sessions to their Corporate Parents
- Attend and report into the 'You Matter to us' (Corporate Parenting Board) and create more engagement opportunities with their Corporate Parents
- Have regular meetings with key decision makers to get updates on their 'You Said, We Will, We Did'
- Continue to be involved in the Regional Children in Care Council work and attend the annual residential
- Deliver a session at each Mandatory Children's Services Induction Event
- Promote their work at the Pathways 'Pop up' sessions
- Support the running of the Pathways 'Bright Futures' group
- Discuss with Pathways at every Voice, Influence and Change meeting what developments they are making in response to what young people want
- Meet with the Executive Director of Children's Services and the Director of Children's Care every six weeks to get an update of developments
- Be involved in the South Tees Safeguarding Children Partnership conference
- Work with 'We Matter' and the residential homes to design and deliver a Children's Home Fortnight,' similar to the Foster Carer Fortnight
- Co design with Pathways a 'Skills' week looking at Training, Employment, University, Apprenticeships, Work experience and Volunteering opportunities

Our plans for 2024-2027

My Voice Matters - Young People (up to 25 Years) with Educational Needs and Disabilities will:

- Have accessible opportunities to be involved.
- Be engaged within their educational settings
- Co-produce and deliver the annual 'My Voice Matters' conference
- Ensure educational settings promote and attend the conference
- Tell key decision makers what key areas they want them to work on to improve their experiences
- Hear back from key decision makers on their 'You Said, We Will, We Did' progress
- Attend the SEND and Inclusion Strategic meeting twice a year
- Ensure young people and their families know about the 'Local Offer', making sure information is easily accessible and meets their needs
- Tell key decision makers what makes 'Good Transitions'

Family Hub Community Champions will:

- Meet on a regular basis
- Promote their role within their community and local Family Hub
- Increase further participation of parents and carers by offering different engagement methods
- Meet with service providers to report what parents/carers are saying
- Ensure key decision makers evidence impact regarding their 'You Said, We Will, We Did' actions
- Attend and report into the Family Help Board
- Be part of the regional Parent/Carer meetings and events

Updating the Strategy

- We will review and update this strategy with our volunteers, services and partners: March 2026 or earlier if required.

Our Appreciation

We would like to thank all of the young people and parents who have helped us with this strategy:

Young People - Ruby W, Ruby C, Cole, Phoebe, Oskar, Charlie, Pearl, Rosie, Adam, Harriett, Louisa, Caitlin, Chanice

Parents - Tim and Tiawo

Thank you all for your help in creating this strategy - we appreciate you all so much.

How to get involved!



Email us at:

Participation@Middlesbrough.gov.uk

Keep up with what we're doing on our socials!

Click the icons to be taken to our pages.



Our Website



Instagram



Twitter (X)



Middlesbrough's
Local Offer
for young
people/families
with SEND