

Children’s Services Scrutiny Panel Spotlight Policy Review 2012 – 2013

Increasing Young People’s Involvement in Service Design and Delivery

Draft Report

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1 Foreword from the Scrutiny Lead Member for Children's Services

This second spotlight review from the Children's Services Scrutiny Panel looks at the importance of involving children and young people in service design and delivery.



Society and communities are made up of a variety of people of differing ages, backgrounds and ethnicity which is why it is so important to engage with as many groups and people as possible. As a local authority we need to gain the views and opinions of every layer of a community to ensure that our services reach and satisfy those who need and use them most. Children and young people are one of these layers and they too have a right to be heard, a fact which is promoted in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Children's Services Scrutiny Panel have gathered evidence from a number of key witnesses during their investigation and it is both surprising and reassuring to learn of the level of engagement that exists with young people across the city. It is also good to see such a broad range of young people from a variety of backgrounds that ensures engagement provides a range of opinions and viewpoints.

There are of course many benefits to being involved in participative processes and for young people this can help them to develop a range of new skills, including around public speaking, analysis of data and boosting their own confidence. If any evidence was needed of this then the Panel experienced it when inviting a number of young people to share their own experiences with us, it was clear to see they were confident and enthusiastic about their involvement. But perhaps most importantly they valued the opportunity to be involved and felt that they had a real chance to make a difference.

As always I would like to express my gratitude to my Scrutiny Panel colleagues for their commitment and contribution to this piece of work, which as always has proved invaluable. I would also like to thank the officers from Children's Services who gave their time and expertise to the review. Finally I would also like to thank the young people who came in and gave evidence to the Panel; they were a credit to their organisations and provided a useful insight into their view of engagement and participation.

Councillor Bob Francis, Scrutiny Lead Member for Children's Services

2 Introduction

- 2.1 The Scrutiny Conference provided a variety of scrutiny topics for potential review during the coming year. The Children's Services Scrutiny Panel, commissioned by the Scrutiny Committee, agreed to undertake a spotlight review around the participation of children and young people in service design, delivery and evaluation.

3 Aim of the Review

- 3.1 To understand the importance of young people's involvement in service design, delivery and evaluation and what potential there is to widen this further to enhance services that impact on children, young people and their families.

4 Terms of Reference

- 4.1 The title of the review was agreed as 'Increasing young people's involvement in service design and delivery' and its terms of reference were agreed as:
- (a) To understand how we currently engage with young people around service design, delivery and evaluation;
 - (b) To recognise the impact of young people's involvement in service design, delivery and evaluation;
 - (c) To identify the barriers to young people's participation and explore ways and initiatives that can increase access to participation for children and young people.

5 Membership of the Panel

- 5.1 The membership of the Children's Services Scrutiny Panel during the Municipal Year is outlined below:

Cllrs Bob Francis (Scrutiny Lead Member for Children's Services), Anthony Farr, Doris MacKnight, Robert Oliver, Mary Turton, Philip Tye, Linda Williams, Amy Wilson and co-opted member Rose Elliott.

6 Methods of Investigation

- 6.1 The approach to this work included a range of research methods namely:
- (a) Desktop Research;
 - (b) Use of secondary research e.g. surveys, questionnaires;
 - (c) Evidence presented by key stakeholders;
 - (d) Evidence from members of the public at meetings or focus groups; and,
 - (e) Site Visits.
- 6.2 Throughout the course of the review process the panel gathered evidence from a number of key witnesses including:
- (a) Keith Moore – Executive Director Children's Services;

- (b) Cllr Pat Smith – Cabinet Member for Children’s Services;
- (c) Beverley Scanlon – Head of Commissioning and Change Management;
- (d) Jane Wheeler – Participation and Engagement Officer;
- (e) David Laverick – Workforce Development Consultant;
- (f) Judith Allen – Quality and Improvement Manager;
- (g) Beverley Hunter-Smith – Principal Case Manager (Leaving Care Service);
- (h) Laura Cassidy – Health Improvement Practitioner (Young People);
- (i) Jessica & Phillippa – Representatives from City Equals;
- (j) Kieran – Representative from Change Council;
- (k) Ryan & Andrew – Representatives from Castleview Academy;
- (l) Hannah & Ashleigh – Representatives from Sandhill View;
- (m) Allison Clarke – Library Manager;
- (n) Alan Rowan – Business Relationships and Governance Manager;
- (o) Stuart Cuthbertson - Senior Policy Officer for People & Neighbourhoods.

6.3 All statements in this report are made based on information received from more than one source, unless it is clarified in the text that it is an individual view. Opinions held by a small number of people may or may not be representative of others’ views but are worthy of consideration nevertheless.

7 Findings of the Review

Findings relate to the main themes raised during the panel's investigations and evidence gathering.

7.1 What is Participation?

7.1.1 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) grants a child who is capable of forming a view the right to express that view freely in all matters affecting him or her; and these views should be given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. The UK is a signatory of the UNCRC. Although the Convention has not been incorporated into UK law, it is an important commitment which has an impact on policy and on all aspects of children's lives in the UK.

7.1.2 The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's 2009 General Comment on the child's right to be heard considers the meaning of participation as:

*'...ongoing processes, which include information-sharing and dialogue between children and adults based on mutual respect, and in which children can learn how their views and those of adults are taken into account and shape the outcome of such processes.'*¹

7.1.3 While the term participation is in common usage for listening and engaging with children and young people there is no universally endorsed single fixed meaning or definition. Treseder defines participation as 'a process where someone influences decisions about their lives and this leads to change.'² The exact change which is brought about can vary based on the context but may relate to both the process and the outcome.

7.2 The Importance of Young People's Participation

7.2.1 The Department for Education (2012) Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities on services and activities to improve young people's wellbeing states that 'Local authorities must take steps to ascertain the views of young people and to take them into account in making decisions and activities for them, in line with article 12 of UNCRC. They should establish and maintain a structured arrangement for doing so. To inform continuous improvement, these arrangements should enable young people to inspect and report at least annually on the quality and accessibility of provision. As appropriate they should be involved actively in service design, delivery and governance. Young people should receive the support they need to participate, ensuring representation of the full diversity of local young people, and those who may not otherwise have a voice'.

7.2.2 There is a strong track record and continuing programme of involving children and young people in the work of the Council through a variety of methods and initiatives. The Executive Director of Children's Services highlighted that Sunderland City Council fully supported the UNCRC and had cemented this signing up to the national pledge. Children's Services have also adopted Hear by Right, October 2012, which helps children, young people and adults work together to plan for change at both strategic and operational levels across partnerships, departments

¹ UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (2009) General Comment Number 12 the child's right to be heard.

² Treseder, P. (1997) *Empowering children and young people* London: Save the Children.

and single organisations. By using Hear by Right standards and incorporating this within the participation and engagement framework it secures the sustained and effective participation of children and young people.

- 7.2.3 The Children and Young People's plan also provides strong strategic direction for participation through its focus on creating a city where children and young people contribute towards the development of services for all people in the city, through giving their views and being listened to. The current plan was developed and refreshed in consultation with approximately 5,000 young people around their core priorities. The Executive Director also stressed the importance, at a strategic level, of the local authority's role in supporting young people to make a positive contribution and provide a sense of clarity around the involvement of children and young people.
- 7.2.4 Research has indicated that having only those who were 'clever', 'popular' and 'well behaved' elected onto school councils, failed to reflect the differences among and between children in terms of life experiences, class background, age, gender, disability and ethnicity³. Sunderland City Council ensures that it engages with a wide range of groups and young people through a variety of mechanisms including through City Equals, the Change Council, Youth Parliament and school councils. School councils were highlighted as a very positive aspect of engagement within the city, encouraging children and young people to become more actively involved in the development of their school. Being a member of a school council or youth forum can mean that some young people are ideally placed to develop their confidence and public speaking skills. Although these often work in isolation and operate in different ways, there is potential for the sharing of best practice and through this enhanced development of the school council model across Sunderland.
- 7.2.5 The Portfolio Holder for Children's Services also explained to the Panel that it is important to ensure a proactive recruitment of young people to replenish the pool as young people grow older or move on. It is also seen as important to ensure that views, opinions and perspectives of young people remain current as young people's trends and fashions change very quickly from one generation to the next. Also engaging with a wide variety of young people is not always easy, despite the inclusiveness of participation groups, there is often an associated perception of those involved. School councils, youth villages and youth centres were all highlighted as providing positive ways to develop relationships and engage with young people.

7.3 The Variety of Engagement Mechanisms

- 7.3.1 Sunderland is actively developing a culture of involving children, young people and their families in the design, delivery and evaluation of services across the city. It was recognised by the Panel that there was a good network of champions across services and the VCS to help promote and facilitate youth involvement. To ensure a representative view of children and young people the Council continually looks at ways of improving the engagement process and have several groups established across the city.

Children's Trust Advisory Network

- 7.3.2 Children's Trust Advisory Network (CTAN) was re-established successfully in May 2012 with 23 named young people from across the city including;

³ Dr Ciara Davey (2010). Children's Participation in Decision-Making. Participation Works

Young Asian Voices;
Change Council;
Academy 360;
Sandhill View;
Castleview Academy;
Change Council;

Sunderland Youth Parliament;
Washington DOE;
XL Villages;
City Equals;
North Area Youth Forum;
Young Carers.

7.3.3 CTAN has met bi-monthly since May 2012 with an average of 15 young people attending each meeting. The young people who attend CTAN are empowered to take work away from the network and consult with a larger audience in their own services, schools or organisations. CTAN have been involved in the following;

- Confirming and challenging the children and young people's priorities through consulting with more than 500 young people;
- Reviewing and redesigning the 'Letsgosunderland' website;
- Part of the current youth review consultation process and more importantly involved in the procurement process;
- CTAN young people have been involved in the service specification of the up and coming Healthwatch;
- Consulted on the Health and wellbeing strategy;
- Visit from the probation service to seek their views on how the probation service should tailor their work to schools;
- CTAN Members volunteered to act as judges for the Young Achiever awards;
- Developing the Young Inspectors Scheme.

Sunderland Youth Parliament

7.3.4 Sunderland Youth Parliament is a group of young people that aim to represent the voices of young people in the city. One of their main tasks is to arrange and facilitate the 'Young People's State of the City Debate'. Now in its 7th year the State of City Debate brings together young people from schools across the city to debate the top five themes voted for by young people in the city. In 2012 seventy one young people attended the debate from 13 schools, University of Sunderland, City Equals, Springboard and Pennywell Youth project. The topics covered included, discrimination, sexual health, student's rights, anti-social behaviour and health. Anti-social behaviour was voted as 2013 topic with 23 votes. Sunderland Youth Parliament will produce a full report detailing the debate in full detail which will be available for public view.

City Equals

7.3.5 City equals is a group representing the voice of young people with learning disabilities/difficulties (LDD) living in Sunderland. Members attend regular meetings and promote issues specific to young people with LDD. In 2012 city equals were involved in the following;

- Worked with ITV fixers and completed a DVD on discrimination experienced in the work place;
- Attended the State of the City Event and Young People's State of the City Debate;
- One member achieved a place as an Olympic torchbearer for their community involvement;
- Took part in Parliamentary training, Hate Crime training and Committee training;
- City equals were consulted on the anti-bullying strategy and in the creation of the anti-bullying charter;

- Members also visited all the social inclusion projects in the city to update other young people with LDD about what is happening.

Change Council

7.3.6 Change Council is a group representing the voices of children and young people in care in Sunderland. Membership involves young people working with senior staff to improve and develop services that affect their lives. This group links into the council's Corporate Parenting Board, chaired by Cllr P Smith, and meets to promote the needs and wellbeing of Sunderland's 450 looked after children.

Takeover Day 2012

7.3.7 Takeover Day is a major national event organised by the Office of the Children's Commissioner. It has been running for six years and Sunderland have actively taken part for the past three years. Over 170 young people took part in Takeover day on 23rd November 2012 from three primary schools, five secondary schools, City of Sunderland College, Sunderland's Leaving Care Service and Youth Almighty Youth Project. Young people worked alongside Northumbria Police, Sunderland Magistrates, Sunderland Youth Offending Service, Sunderland Leaving Care service, Risk and Resilience Service, Venerable Bede School and Academy 360.

7.3.8 Young people engaged in the opportunity to shadow the Mayor and Mayoress, MP, Councillors and other senior officers including the Assistant Chief Executive, Executive Director of Children's Services, Director of Health, Housing & Adult Services and the Director of HR & OD. While other young people shared a challenge with Sunderland Safeguarding Children's Board, Sunderland Communications team and Family Adult and Community Learning.

School Councils

7.3.9 School councils encourage children and young people to become more actively involved in the development of their school. Over the years, school councils have been consulted on various issues such as the appointment of staff, changes to uniform, tackling bullying, the school environment and charity fund raising. All schools have the potential to benefit from an information sharing session, either primary or secondary schools, and school council leads could come together to share best practice and look at the creation of a support mechanism.

Sunderland Young Inspectors

7.3.10 One of the positives from this review is that Members realise that within the Council young people can play be a valuable role as young inspectors, scrutinising and auditing the quality of provision and the progress made to improve outcomes.

7.3.11 Sunderland Young Inspectors has successfully recruited and trained 13 young people in February 2013 from across the city. The young inspectors programme will be a critical tool for commissioning agencies to check from children and young people's perspectives whether services are meeting their contracted objectives. The stages of inspection will include;

- *Recruiting Services* – who wants to be inspected?
- *Brief Services* – potential service for inspection needs to understand the commitment for youth inspection; the process and their responsibilities.
- *Brief the Inspectors* – young inspectors need to understand the organisation; the range of services being provided; key questions and logistics of the inspection.

- *Inspection Visit* – young inspectors visit the organisation and speak with a wide range of staff, volunteers, other stakeholders and service users.
- *Drafting the Report* – young inspectors work on a set of evidence based recommendations which explain how outcomes for young people could be improved.
- *Dissemination of Information* – the report is made available to the service and service users including the recommendations.
- *Follow up Visit* – return to the organisation to see if the recommendations have made an impact and if any new issues have emerged.

7.3.12 Both the Executive Director and Portfolio Holder saw the Sunderland Young Inspectors programme as a critical tool for commissioning agencies to check from children and young people's perspectives if services are meeting their contracted objectives. The importance that the young inspectors programme keeps the interest of young people and that there is a rolling recruitment and review of the group was highlighted.

7.3.13 The Panel queried how young people were recruited for the Sunderland Inspectors? It was acknowledged that the level of commitment required could and did discourage many young people. However the positions were widely advertised through posters in schools, emails to contacts, headteacher briefings and attendance at some school assemblies and youth centres. It was confirmed that those recruited so far were from 4 of the 5 localities and included representatives from schools, college, connexions or youth forums. Members recognised that such experience was good for a young person's CV and that further accreditation through ASDAN was being explored.

7.3.14 Members considered the potential for involving governors and governing bodies in engagement work and it was acknowledged that currently there were no links with governing bodies. This identified a potential opportunity for further development of engagement routes with young people and this could be explored further through the individual chairs of governing bodies or the governors association.

7.4 The Benefits to Participation and Engagement

7.4.1 There are many benefits to being actively involved in participation and engagement and much of the evidence points to successful experiences influencing all those involved, be they children, young people, adults or services and organisations. One of the key benefits is around young people's recognition that they are major stakeholders in society with important contributions to make to their communities. Representatives from CTAN endorsed this by explaining to the Panel that one of the benefits of adults talking and listening to young people is the ability to challenge pre-conceived views and ideas. The young people felt that many adults stereotyped young people as a problem and a group to be worried about. By engaging with young people can help to illustrate that most young people are also interested about community and want to have a say about issues that affect them.

7.4.2 Benefits also include the clear opportunities for young people to take action on issues that impact upon them and experience how decisions are made and how to actively contribute. Again young people who had been interviewed by the Panel outlined issues that had arisen during a restructure within Children's Services that directly impacted on the support received to the Change Council. The young people on the committee had felt able to question this decision and had taken it through the

formal complaints procedure and now felt that they had made their point but also understood the reasons behind the change.

- 7.4.3 The report outlines clearly the rights of children and young people to be heard but it is important to highlight that such a right also brings with it a certain level of responsibility. Being involved through the various mechanisms detailed elsewhere in the report provides those actively involved in participation with an experience of this alliance between rights and responsibilities. The Sunderland Young Inspectors programme is a good example of how the practical training, as part of the programme, builds upon the existing qualities of the young people, such as communication and teamwork skills. As well as seeking to ensure that the young inspectors have a full understanding of their role, rights and responsibilities. Tools for assessment are shared and the spectrum of available reporting methods is explored, including video or flipchart presentations, surveys, photographic evidence and written reports. These training opportunities provide a vehicle to discuss and gain a greater understanding of concepts such as diversity, confidentiality, equality and prejudice.
- 7.4.4 Perhaps the most obvious benefits for young people is in their own development through a range of new skills including debating, negotiating, group-decision making and influencing decision-makers as well a growth their own confidence and feeling of value. When discussing this with CTAN representatives it was evident that those present all felt that at formal and structured settings they were valued but they still felt that outside in the real world it was much more difficult to break down the stereotypes most people held about young people. Although there was a general feeling that being involved in participation and engagement was very positive as it provides something different to do as well as contributing to making a difference.
- 7.4.5 The benefits are not solely confined to young people there are also key advantages for services and organisations in seeking the engagement and participation of children, young people and their families around service design, delivery and evaluation. In times of greater financial constraint it is ever more important that services are based on identified need and an effective use of resources. A recent example of this involves the library service which has consulted with a wide range of service users including young people through the CTAN groups to gain their views and experiences of the library service. CTAN were able to put the point across of what young people would want from a library service including the introduction of more modern technology such as iPads and Kindles as well as making the space brighter and having a social space for young people.
- 7.4.6 The Learning Champions Scheme that has been used within local communities certainly shows the capacity for communities to be strong, vibrant and willing to engage around issues that impact upon them. A real benefit to participation is the development of this 'community voice' which can help to shape services and direct resources to best effect. By actively engaging and listening to local communities organisations can ensure that services are tailored to best meet the needs of that community, and of course will have more chance of success with local people involved and empowered from the outset.
- 7.4.7 In strengthening links within communities can also have the added benefit of creating opportunities to engage with those more difficult to reach or socially excluded groups. If communities see the results of engagement and participation as directly influencing and/or shaping services and service delivery this has the potential to act as a catalyst to further engagement and its promotion by community

members. This is perfectly illustrated through the work of Participation and Engagement Champions working within communities with young people, families and the 35 learning providers currently engaging with families across the city. The use of learning champions from the community has helped to improve engagement and provide the types of courses communities want to attend. Learning Champions were identified as volunteers from within communities, with no set requirements or qualifications; far more important was the ability to create a mix of sexes, ages and people creating a representative cross-section of that community. Through engagement and consultation a new curriculum plan has been developed and circulated within communities and the evidence indicated greater levels of engagement through responding to the needs of communities.

- 7.4.8 Continued and increasing participation with children and young people also results in the development of more creative and innovative ways to conduct such engagement. The scrutiny committees themselves have used innovative ways of gathering evidence and employed a 'Big Brother' style diary room during a previous policy review to engage with young people around issues of not being in education, employment or training. This approach provided a novel way to gather evidence through the use of popular culture that many young people could relate to. It was also recognised during this review that often engagement and participation work needs to be tailored to the audience, and there needs to be an awareness of the intended audience as the one size fits all does approach does not work.

7.5 The Barriers to Participation and Engagement

- 7.5.1 It can often be the case that children and young people accept that adults are best placed to make decisions on their behalf. The issue is perhaps more about children and young people feeling excluded from understanding the rationale behind such a decision. It can leave young people with little understanding as to how their views have contributed to a particular decision-making process. Research highlights that a non-participative culture can create a negative effect on the relationships between adults, children and young people with values of respect and inclusiveness failing to impact in the culture of schools, families and communities⁴. It was therefore reassuring through the panel's findings and discussions with members of CTAN, to see the value these young people placed on having their voice heard and feeling actively involved in helping to change and improve services for young people.
- 7.5.2 This is further reinforced by a number of witnesses interviewed by the Panel including consultation on the Health and Wellbeing Strategy where all information provided by young people from the CTAN group would be considered in the wider remit of the strategy and an update provided to the network as the strategy is developed. A similar scenario was reported in relation to the redesign of the library services where views were collected to contribute to the shaping and influencing of the future library service. Again CTAN would be informed of what was happening and how their views have contributed to the work.
- 7.5.3 One of the barriers that was highlighted by the young people was around the level of commitment required to be actively involved. The Participation and Engagement Officer did explain to Members that all consultation and engagement work took place outside of school times, and this has been a cornerstone of the council's engagement processes. It should also be noted that active engagement can even

⁴ Dr Ciara Davey (2010). Children's Participation in Decision-Making. Participation Works

have a positive impact on academic achievement and the development of new skills through these participative processes.

- 7.5.4 Peer pressure and the perception of an inequality of opportunities can also restrict participation by young people. Being involved in participative groups can often be seen as not being 'cool' and this type of peer pressure can deter many young people from becoming involved. Although in speaking with young people it was noted that many of their friends became involved once they had seen what their friends were doing, a peer pressure in reverse. Certain groups of children and young people can also feel particularly disempowered in the participation process. It is important to have a wide range of young people involved and Sunderland through its many participative groups looks to ensure a broad cross-section of young people, and in so doing reducing this inequality of opportunities.
- 7.5.5 Members realised that it is very often the case that some children and young people either do not want to, or do not see the point of, participation in relation to their own lives and experiences. Members also recognised that getting involved in participation is not for everyone, but that it was important that young people understand how decisions do and can affect their everyday lives, and that it is not solely the domain of adults to feed into decision making processes.
- 7.5.6 Transport was another barrier that young people highlighted and the potential costs of getting to and from meetings and consultation projects. Again the Participation Officer reassured the Panel that the local authority was committed to ensuring that no young person was out of pocket as a result of participating with the council or its services.
- 7.5.7 Difficulties in engaging young people in consultations are not confined solely to children and young people and there are a number of barriers which can be associated with adults, services and organisations in general. One of the most common is around the lack of opportunities for some officers and service areas to develop the suitable approaches needed to engage young people in meetings, consultations and participation. It is difficult to develop effective relationships and engagement techniques where contact with children, young people and families are minimal or non-existent. The importance of seeking professional support in engagement was acknowledged by Members and the support and advice of the Participation and Engagement Officer was recognised as being pivotal to successful engagement in these circumstances.
- 7.5.8 A good example of this arose during the evidence gathering session with representatives from the Policy Team, a traditional department within the council. The Policy Team held a number of engagement sessions around informing and consulting on the Health and Well-Being Strategy, and this very much focused on adults in the health and social care sector, the team also realised that they needed to consult with young people. This was a steep learning curve for the policy team; their traditional approaches would not engage young people and therefore had to re-focus their entire approach. They used less imposing venues, developed different presentational styles to ensure it resonated with young people, and the team also adjusted the language used. The policy team learned a lot from this consultation which they recognised would help shape any future engagement with young people.
- 7.5.9 There can often be a level of cynicism about why children, young people and parent/carers should be involved in service design, delivery and evaluation and this

too can create barriers to meaningful engagement. It can often be difficult for those most involved or at the centre of a service to see the benefit of involving children and young people, or anyone for that matter, becoming overly protective and seeing little value gained from such an exercise. However not only is the right of children to be heard entrenched in European Conventions it is also important for services to continually look to develop and improve. Through the collection of a variety of opinions and viewpoints from across the social range not only can common themes and threads be gleaned but it also helps services to create relationships and develop ownership with its primary users. As well as ensuring that key service resources are targeted effectively.

7.6 The Impact of Participation and Engagement

- 7.6.1 Ultimately the real measure of participation and engagement of children, young people and their families is the resulting impact this makes on service design and delivery. A good recent example that Members looked at involved a young people's consultation around the youth service and activities review within the local authority. A questionnaire was initially produced that was sent out across Sunderland to youth projects, schools and other organisations who have contact with young people. Further to this a group consultation was held with CTAN who were empowered to take the information back into their services and organisations to gather more views. All of these views and opinions were analysed and inputted into the service specification. Several young people also volunteered to be part of the procurement process and identified two questions they thought important for youth providers to answer as part of the tendering process. This is now at the evaluation stage, and importantly, once completed the young people will be informed of the outcomes.
- 7.6.2 This is a good illustration of how consultation and engagement with young people can make a significant impact on services by influencing the tendering process for youth services and activities. Also the use of questionnaires shows a positive engagement technique that can help gather a wide range of views in a short space of time. Often formal meetings and the unfamiliarity of actually being asked to voice an opinion can be the greatest deterrent to encouraging youth involvement and by using alternative methods can help to increase engagement on a particular issue.
- 7.6.3 Members also acknowledged the involvement through consultation of over 5,000 young people in the development of the Children and Young People's Plan. Preparations are now underway for the second delivery plan 2013-2016, with the Children's Trust undertaking confirm and challenge sessions in 2012 to ascertain if current priorities are still relevant. In ensuring that the priorities are relevant to children and young people CTAN have also contributed to these confirm and challenge sessions. This was done as a focus group and then young people took questionnaires back into their schools. The information gathered included priorities that young people felt were relevant and those that were not, again feedback will be presented to the group once the delivery plan has been produced.
- 7.6.4 Research⁵ around the impact of participation and engagement also illustrates the changes made to service provision across local authorities in England, while some change are minor it is still important in that young people's views are being taken into account. These examples included:

⁵ Doers and Shapers – Young people's volunteering and engagement in public services. An evaluation report of the Beacon Councils' Positive Youth Engagement Peer Support Programme. De Montfort University.

- Staff re-training in a leisure project had taken place after young people's feedback (despite the fact that it had just won a major award);
- Teachers had benefited from young people's input in delivering personal, health and social education (PSHE) and peer education offered a dynamic approach that interested pupils;
- Several services had young volunteers who had not only increased capacity to deliver but had also given important feedback on how the services were seen by the public, how to recruit young staff, and how to involve minority communities.

7.6.5 Increased involvement of young people is also evident across Sunderland City Council and increasingly services are looking to gather the views of children, young people and their families. A number of examples of this include:

- Requests are made by any service or organisation to attend a CTAN meeting to gain young people's perspectives or to help gather a wide range of young people's views;
- Young people are involved in service evaluations;
- The newly developed young inspector's team, consisting of 13 fully trained young people;
- Children and young people are involved in National Takeover Day;
- Viewpoint is used as an evaluation tool for looked after children and leaving care young people.

7.6.6 The only way to truly gauge impact is to ensure that robust evaluation and monitoring exists when consulting with children and young people. Feedback to young people is crucial as they must see what has changed to ensure their continued commitment. It is also equally as important to explain when things do not happen, through for example unforeseen circumstances, for them to feel valued and listened to. Within Sunderland the Scrutiny Panel have seen clear evidence from a variety of sources of the importance placed on feedback and evaluation and this is reflected by the young people interviewed who clearly felt that their views were listened to and valued by the organisation.

7.7 Participation and Engagement Champions

7.7.1 Sunderland City Council has an underpinning vision of participation in that all children, young people and their families should have the opportunity to actively participate in the decisions that affect their lives, in the delivery of the services they receive and in the development of the policies that impact on them. In supporting this vision a number of Participation and Engagement Champions have been identified across service areas within the Council.

7.7.2 Participation and Engagement Champions have key roles to play in driving the implementation of the Participation and Engagement Framework across all services and partners working with children, young people and their families to ensure consultation and active engagement takes place in decision-making processes that

impact upon them. It is also the role of the champions to ensure their own teams always consider how services can be more effectively developed through the engagement of service users in design, delivery and evaluation of services.

7.7.3 The Children's Services Scrutiny Panel met with a number of Participation and Engagement Champions and there was a clear theme, from these discussions, that there are right and wrong ways to make services better and it is important to bring in the voice of young people, providing an opportunity for them to be involved. An example of this was given around the involvement of young people in developing the role of social workers, a number of young people signed up to contribute due to the direct impact on their own lives. Through this involvement social workers are now coming through the programme supporting young people in the way they have expressed, and there is a positive progression as a direct result of young people's participation.

7.7.4 Members also recognised that there were a variety of ways to engage with young people apart from the traditional meetings format and other engagement techniques including opinion polls, questionnaires, text messaging, and there was also the potential to explore other social media platforms that young people are to interact with. This also includes young people's accessibility to a range of key council documents including the Children and Young People's Plan which was emphasised by the Executive Director of Children's Services as being important and needing to be addressed, and young people having a role to play in developing this too. Young people have used a variety of media to break down information including DVD's illustrating discrimination in the work place and a young person's perspective of foster care. Young People were also involved in the re-design of the 'Letsgosunderland' website including navigation improvement and increasing the young person orientation of the site. The potential for a Participation and Engagement Champion within the Communications service of the Council could help to promote engagement and ensure that literature and materials around council services consider the children and young people audience where appropriate.

7.7.5 The Participation and Engagement Champions highlighted the difficulties in engaging with young people and how the importance of honesty was integral to any engagement. The Your Welcome project was identified to Members as a positive engagement with young people around their access and interface with health services. The project covered staff training, skills, attitude, waiting areas for young people and how health services involve young people in their services. There was also a concern around how services continue to engage with the next generation of young people and how recruiting young people is also difficult and even when young people are willing to participate there are barriers to this including transport, family support and time.

7.7.6 There is a vast array of young people moving in differing social, economic and cultural circles and it is important to access as many different groups as possible. Participation and engagement revolves around being able to hear as many voices of as many young people in Sunderland. In this respect the Panel recognised the importance of the profile and awareness of Participation and Engagement Champions across the Council and acknowledged that this could be increased.

8 Conclusions

The Panel made the following overall conclusions:-

- 8.1 Children and young people's participation and engagement is now a common policy and practice demand. This has been in part driven by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and now increasingly children and young people are becoming more involved in decisions that affect them either individually or as a group. Sunderland clearly recognises this and actively encourages the participation of children, young people and their families in decisions, service design and delivery.
- 8.2 The local authority has a clear role in supporting young people to make a positive contribution and the council looks to engage with a wide range of groups and young people, not just those who are perceived as 'clever' or 'popular'. This is a real strength of the engagement process in Sunderland and through groups like City Equals, the Change Council and the Youth Parliament there are the means and mechanism to gather a wide and disparate range of views and perspectives. Children and young people's age can often afford them a unique perspective, over adults, to creatively problem solve an issue. Also involving young people in decision-making processes and accessing this right can provide respect, value and a feeling of active citizenship in a shared community setting.
- 8.3 School is a principal part of any young persons life therefore it is of little surprise that school councils are one of the initial routes to young people becoming actively involved in participation and engagement. The development of skills and the realisation of the potential for influencing issues that directly affect a young person can lead to further involvement with a number of other participative groups. However school councils operate very much in isolation of one another and there is most likely some excellent practice taking place across Sunderland schools. Sharing best practice and the development of a support mechanism for school councils in both primary and secondary sectors could advance participation and engagement even further. There is also the potential to link into school governing bodies, which was highlighted by Members of the Panel, and this conversation could also be developed through this mechanism.
- 8.4 The benefits to children and young people being involved in service design, delivery and evaluation are numerous and not solely confined to young people. It is good to realise that practitioners, managers and policy-makers are becoming more committed to children and young people's participation and look to ensure that it is central to their work. This thinking has been a constant theme throughout the evidence gathering that the panel has undertaken. Children, young people and those supporting their participation have continued to develop effective ways of engaging and working together. It is also clear to see through speaking with young people that they really appreciate being involved from an early stage, rather than having decisions brought to them almost as a fait accompli.
- 8.5 In looking at engaging and strengthening relationships with young people around participation the use of different methods and techniques should not be underestimated. Members acknowledged the steep learning curves that officers can encounter in initial engagement with young people, and how traditional methods and language are not effective in capturing and getting the best out of young people. Initiatives like Takeover Day can also serve to forge new relationships and provide a platform for officers, members and young people to gain a mutual respect for each other's role.

- 8.6 Just as there are a number of benefits to participation there are also numerous barriers that can prevent young people from getting involved. In looking at these barriers it was evident that the local authority has looked at many of these issues and looked at ways to eliminate these as barriers. It is also through the work of the Participation and Engagement Officer that support exists to help iron out and develop inclusive approaches that remove many of the barriers that can hinder engagement. Although it should be pointed out that like in many other walks of life there are some young people who will not, or do not want to be involved in participation and engagement which should be respected too.
- 8.7 A key issue that has arisen from the review is around the importance of tailoring an approach to suit the audience, a one size fits all approach will not work, and this is nowhere more important than when dealing with young people. From the literature and resources to the very language used it is important that it resonates with the target audience otherwise it could prove extremely difficult to engage in any meaningful way. Members acknowledged evidence from a number of services and Participation and Engagement Champions all of whom supported this view. It would be extremely beneficial to have an engagement champion within the Communications Team to promote the Participation and Engagement Framework and ensure that promotional and consultative materials and literature consider children and young people where appropriate.
- 8.8 Participation and Engagement within Sunderland is strong and well developed with a good recent history of successes in engaging with young people. The Scrutiny Panel have witnessed the enthusiasm of officers and young people alike to engagement and this is a real testament to the organisations relationships with young people. There is always room for improvement and the Participation and Engagement Officer is continually looking to expand engagement practices across the Council and the Young Inspectors Programme will be at the forefront of this. It is important that all voices are heard and valued across the broad spectrum and make-up of communities and through this the local authority can target resources, develop services and ensure that it is fit for purpose and what users really want.

9 Draft Recommendations

- 9.1 The Children's Services Scrutiny Panel has taken evidence from a variety of sources to assist in the formulation of a balanced range of recommendations. The Panel's key recommendations are as outlined below:-
- (a) That Children's Services explore the potential for an information sharing support mechanism between schools to share examples of best practice in relation to the operation and performance of school councils and also look at the development of links between school governing bodies and young people;
 - (b) That Scrutiny Members consider the possibility of the Scrutiny Committee or representative Scrutiny Panel being actively involved in Takeover Day 2013;
 - (c) That consideration is given, by the Communications Team, to the appointment of a Participation and Engagement Champion to promote and support the work of participation and engagement within the Communications Team.

10. Acknowledgements

10.1 The Committee is grateful to all those who have presented evidence during the course of our review. We would like to place on record our appreciation, in particular of the willingness and co-operation we have received from the below named:-

- (a) Keith Moore – Executive Director Children’s Services;
- (b) Cllr Pat Smith – Portfolio Holder Children’s Services;
- (c) Jane Wheeler – Participation and Engagement Officer;
- (d) Beverley Scanlon - Head of Commissioning and Change Management;
- (e) David Laverick – Workforce Development Consultant;
- (f) Judith Allen – Quality and Improvement Manager;
- (g) Beverley Hunter-Smith – Principal Case Manager (Leaving Care Service);
- (h) Laura Cassidy – Health Improvement Practitioner (Young People);
- (i) Representatives from the Children’s Trust Advisory Network (CTAN);
- (j) Stuart Cuthbertson – Senior Policy Officer for People & Neighbourhoods;
- (k) Alan Rowan – Business Relationships and Governance Manager;
- (l) Allison Clarke - Library Manager.

11. Background Papers

11.1 The following background papers were consulted or referred to in the preparation of this report:

- (a) United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (2009).
- (b) Treseder, P. (1997) *Empowering children and young people* London: Save the Children.
- (c) Dr Ciara Davey (2010). Children’s Participation in Decision-Making. Participation Works.
- (d) Doers and Shapers – Young people’s volunteering and engagement in public services. An evaluation report of the Beacon Councils’ Positive Youth Engagement Peer Support Programme. De Montfort University.