



Bolton Children and Young People's

Participation and Engagement Strategy

2026 – 2029

**“ Our voices are heard
and acted upon to
make a difference. ”**



Foreword



Sandra Bruce,
Director of Children's Services,
Bolton Council

In Bolton we have set out four priorities for our children and young people, to be Happy, Safe, Achieve and Belong. If we are to realise our ambition we need to listen and involve our children and young people to develop and deliver the services intended for them.

I am thrilled to be able to introduce this new strategy which sets out our approach for how we will do this. It provides a structure to support everyone to develop meaningful ways to engage children and young people. I am especially pleased that this is a dynamic and living strategy that sets participation at the heart of

what we do whilst recognising that this will constantly change and evolve.

A heartfelt thank you to all the children and young people in Bolton who have dedicated their time and effort to collaborate with our officers and partners in crafting our participation strategy.

This strategy is for you! As the Director for Children's Services, I am committed to listening, taking action, and continuously reviewing our work guided by your insights. This strategy will provide our staff and partners with a roadmap for engaging with you—thank you!



Simi Adebajo,
Youth MP

The youth voice of Bolton has always been important, and I believe it is now more than ever before. There is no doubt that Bolton's young people should participate in its causes and movements; including young people in these discussions sets us all up for success.



Jasmine Kwok,
Youth MP

Youth voice matters because young people will be ones living with the decisions being made today. The policies shaped now will affect our education, our opportunities and our communities that we grow up in. That is why it is so important that youth involvement is not left as a tokenistic act, but a conversation that listens to what we have to say and actually shapes our futures.



Cllr. Martin Donaghy,
Executive Cabinet Member for
Children's Services, Bolton Council

I am immensely proud that our Participation Strategy is led by young people. Who better to shape the decisions and policies that will impact them and their peers in the years to come.

This strategy outlines what meaningful participation entails, who is responsible for it, and how we can gauge its success. For contributions that inspire positive action and innovative ideas to enhance outcomes, look no further than the young people of Bolton.

The vision

“In Bolton, we want all children and young people’s voices to be listened to and acted upon.”

This vision was created by the youth voice groups in Bolton and further consulted on and agreed by the Participation and Engagement Forum (task group).

The strategy

The Participation and Engagement Strategy is for all Bolton’s children and young people.

It sets out what we want to achieve over the next three years and the action we will take to ensure all children and young people are actively involved in services in Bolton and have their voice heard and amplified to shape those services.

It has been developed to ensure we meet our statutory duties and that participation and engagement principles with young people are embedded within our practice when designing and delivering services.

The purpose of this strategy is to set out the direction, expectations and standards for participation and engagement with children and young people across Bolton. Also, the strategy will enable partnerships to increase the presence of children and young people’s voices and ensure their views are considered and acted upon.

Impact

The strategy will have a positive impact on the lives of children and young people by ensuring their views shape services enabling the most effective use of resources and they have the best opportunities to participate and engage in all services and activities across the borough.

Children and young people will have opportunities to use their voices to ensure services are developed in a way that enables the best possible outcomes to be achieved for themselves and their peers in terms of leading safe, happy, healthy and successful lives.

Legislation and governance

This strategy is set within the context of national and local policy, legislation and guidance.

The Voice of the Child is a principle embedded in various UK laws and policies. First addressed in the Children Act 1989, and reinforced by subsequent legislation, such as the Children and Families Act 2014, these laws mandate that children should be allowed to express their views and that these views must be considered in the decision-making about their welfare.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) explicitly acknowledges the right of children to express their views and have them taken seriously. Article 12 says that 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.

The National Strategy on Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-Making is underpinned by Lundy’s Model of Participation (2007), which focusses on a rights-based approach to involving children in decision making.

The Lundy Model is endorsed by the National Youth Agency, which collaborates with local, regional and national organisations to improve youth work practice, develop policy and promote youth voice, although different models may operate in Bolton.

The four elements of the Lundy Model provide a way of conceptualising Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and have a rational chronological order: space, voice, influence and audience.

Influence

Ensure that children's views are taken seriously and acted upon, where appropriate.

To achieve this, we ask:

- Were the children's views considered by those with the power to effect change?
- Are there procedures in place that ensure that the children's views have been taken seriously?
- Have the children and young people been provided with feedback explaining the reasons for decisions taken?

Space

Children must be given safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express their view.

To achieve this, we ask:

- Have children's views been actively sought?
- Was there a safe space in which children can express themselves freely?
- Have steps been taken to ensure that all children can take part?

What matters to children and young people

Voice

Children must be facilitated to express their view.

To achieve this, we ask:

- Have children been given the information they need to form a view?
- Do children know that they do not have to take part?
- Have children been given a range of options as to how they might choose to express themselves?

Audience

The view must be listened to.

To achieve this, we ask:

- Is there a process for communicating children's views?
- Do children know who their views are being communicated to?
- Does that person/body have the power to make decisions?

This national context is the basis for this strategy, and Bolton has adopted the Lundy Model of Participation as a way of embedding participation principles.

This strategy supports the **Bolton Vision** for all people in Bolton to be active, connected, and prosperous.

The Children and Young People's Partnership Board are responsible for overseeing the strategy and will receive reports outlining the progress and updates against the priorities and objectives.

While Bolton Council holds the lead responsibility for the strategy, its successful implementation will require collaboration with numerous partners throughout Bolton, including the Children and Young People's Partnership Board and the Participation and Engagement Forum.

Bolton Council will be responsible as the lead agency for monitoring and reporting against progress to the Bolton youth voice groups and the Children and Young People's Board.

The Bolton context

Bolton has a strong ethos of listening to and involving children and young people. This strategy builds on this ethos to ensure that services are developed with people at the centre enabling all to participate and engage with them and young people's voices are key to this.

There is strong partnership working and this is being further developed through the refreshed Participation and Engagement Forum (task group). This consists of organisations that work with children and young people with a wide range of experiences throughout the borough of Bolton.

Bolton's profile

In Bolton:



24% of the population are aged under 18



73,832 children aged 0-17 in Bolton



31,895 children aged 16-25 in Bolton



42.3% of children are from an ethnic minority background



28.2% of children are on free-school meals



3,790 children and young people have an Education Health and Care Plan



596 Looked After Children



153 young people who are currently open to the Youth Justice Service

What has been delivered and what difference has been made?

In Bolton participation and engagement with children and young people is ongoing. Below are some examples of practice that has recently taken place.

World Mental Health Day

Bolton Youth Voice planned and hosted a World Mental Health Day event for Bekindtomymind School Champions. This was a successful event attended by over 130 young people, professionals and guest speakers. It was a great example of collaboration with young people, health professionals, IThrive mental health support partners, Children's Safeguarding Partnership, voluntary groups and senior leaders, towards improving the mental health offer and support in schools for children and young people in Bolton.

Safeguarding Children's Partnership Takeover

Twice a year Bolton Youth Voice takes over the partnership, which consists of a wide membership of leaders and cross departmental members. They raise relevant issues that young people have voiced through youth voice activities. The takeover sessions are interactive and outcome focused where young people hold the members accountable for changes that need to be made.

The outcome of the takeover sessions is that all members are engaging in conversations about how policy needs to change. The young people are consulted on policy changes and feel empowered to see changes happen.

The Empowerment Project

This was a youth led campaign that focused on healthy relationships and informed consent and was funded by Community Safety. This was engagement with Bolton organisations and young people such as Fort Alice, Endeavour, 0-19 Service, Bolton Lads and Girls Club, Bolton LGBT Group and Youth Leads UK.

As a result of this project, a social media campaign has been created that consists of style frames, gifs and captions created by young people. Young people are educated as to what a healthy relationship is and the importance of consent.

Make Your Mark

This is a national youth consultation that happens bi-annually and which is delivered across all Bolton schools and colleges in partnership with Bolton Youth Council and UK Youth Parliament.

This consultation in Bolton allows all young people to vote on their most important issues to be put forward for a UK Youth National campaign. Young people can also get involved with roundtable events with government ministers on topics most voted for.

Participation and Engagement Forum

A bespoke Participation and Engagement Forum has been re-established that will take place three times a year. Sessions to date have consisted of engaging partners in the development of this strategy and creating a space to showcase all youth voice action groups and work, engaging in focus groups for youth led campaigns.

The aim of this forum will be that all partners will be engaged and work collaboratively to ensure young people's voices are acted upon and listened to and develop joint work and events.

What our children and young people have said

Children and young people, via Bolton Youth Voice, were involved in the development of this strategy. They were asked...

“Why are children and young people's voices important in Bolton?”

They told us our approach to participation needs to make the following things happen:

- Represent young people of all ages
- To be listened to and be acted upon
- To be involved for designing services for the future
- Young people are the future of Bolton
- To be inclusive so that all can participate fully.

Our ambition

Priorities

In Bolton, we want all children and young people's voices to be listened to and acted upon.

This vision will be achieved by focussing on five key priorities...



Partners to support the Participation and Engagement vision

Work with children and young people to influence services that will have an impact on them

- To commit to best practice model of participation and engagement and take learning

- To promote inclusivity for all children and young people

- Capture, listen to and learn from the voice of children and young people on what matters to them



Delivery of the Strategy

How will we achieve the vision?

Priority

Key Objectives

Partners to support the Participation and Engagement vision

- Launch and communicate the Participation and Engagement Strategy.
- Further strengthen the Participation and Engagement Forum.
- All partners to endorse and be accountable for the delivery of the strategy within their services to ensure the voice of young people is embedded throughout.

To commit to best practice models of participation and engagement and take learning

- Agree models of best practice and share in an accessible format.
- Offer training opportunities to Forum members around the model of best practice.
- Undertake an annual review against the best practice model.
- Empower the workforce to effectively advocate for the voice of young people, ensuring their influence is realised.

To promote inclusivity for all children and young people

- Deliver equality training, relating to Participation and Engagement, to Forum members.
- Share and promote campaigns as a partnership.
- Share learning across the forum to consider and promote inclusivity.

Capture, listen to and learn from the voice of children and young people on what matters to them

- Establish a training programme with partners to share examples of good practice, tools and expertise on how to listen and respond effectively to children and young people.
- Embed and incorporate strategies to hear the perspectives of children and young people, and take action based on their feedback. Present this information to Senior Leaders to ensure their voices are acknowledged and valued.
- Share outcomes of consultation and engagement across the Forum.

Work with children and young people to influence services that will have an impact on them

- Ensure support mechanisms are in place to engage children and young people.
- Consult and engage with children and young people, where there may be a change in services to help them influence services that affect them.
- Create opportunities for co-production and co-evaluation of services, promoting meaningful engagement with strategic leaders.

Delivering the outcomes

Each partner is encouraged to put together a delivery plan that sets out in detail intended actions with associated timescales and outcome measures.

As part of the Participation and Engagement Forum meetings they will consider how each partner is contributing towards the key objectives and the delivery of the vision to enable reporting to the Children and Young People's Board about activity and impact.





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