

## **Slough Borough Council**

**REPORT TO:** Cabinet

**DATE:** 20<sup>th</sup> November 2023

**SUBJECT:** Children & Young People's Participation Strategy

**CHIEF OFFICER:** Stephen Brown – Chief Executive

**CONTACT OFFICER:** Sue Butcher – Executive Director Children's Services and Chief Executive Slough Children First

**WARD(S):** All

**PORTFOLIO:** Councillor Kelly – Lead Member Children's Services

**KEY DECISION:** Yes

**EXEMPT:** No

**DECISION SUBJECT TO CALL IN:** Yes

**APPENDICES:** Appendix 1 – Slough Children & Young People's Participation Strategy

### **1. Summary and Recommendations**

- 1.1. The aim of the Children & Young People's Participation Strategy is to ensure that Slough is a place where children feel they can voice their views and opinions in a safe and supported environment. The strategy sets out how the Council and its partner agencies will actively encourage and improve participation. The strategy will be delivered through a range of initiatives supported by a multi-agency action plan.
- 1.2. The inspection of children's services by Ofsted in January 2023 identified that children and young people were not involved in the design, delivery or shaping of services or in their own care planning. The inspection report identified an urgent need to improve the meaningful participation of children and young people in developing and delivering services.
- 1.3. The Council has prioritised children and young people in its corporate plan and recognises that services for children and young people should be co-produced and should involve them at all stages of development and implementation. This includes knowing when things are going well and when things are not working for children to ensure continuous improvement.

## Recommendations:

- 1.4. Cabinet is recommended to: Approve the Children & Young People's Participation Strategy at Appendix 1.

## Reason:

- 1.5. To ensure that the views of children and young people are considered and that they are actively participating in improving and shaping service delivery.

## 2. Introduction

- 2.1. The Council's Corporate Plan 2023-2027 states that its purpose is to close the healthy life expectancy gap by focusing on children. There is a commitment to work closely with partners and the community to improve outcomes for children and give them a good start in life. This includes listening to the voices of children and young people and ensuring they have a say in the future of Slough.
- 2.2. The Children & Young People's Participation Strategy has been developed across the partnership through the Children and Young People Partnership Board. Children and our workforce have been actively engaged in developing and reviewing strategies from many other local authorities, from their own experiences and from collaboration with one another.
- 2.3. This strategy sets out a clear commitment across the partnership that there will be one approach for children's participation shaped around the four key concepts of:
  - a) **Space** – a place to which is safe, inclusive and gives opportunity to express views
  - b) **Voice** – active facilitation to support children and young people to share their view
  - c) **Audience** – the right people are there to listen and work with young people
  - d) **Influence** – children and young people can make an impact and honest feedback is given.
- 2.4. The strategy is the central document upon which the Council and its partners will facilitate participation for children and young people. It sets the scene, and the success and impact of the strategy will be taken forward through the Children and Young People Partnership Board.

## 3. Commissioner Review

Commissioners have reviewed this report and have no specific comments to add.

#### 4. Options Considered

4.1. The following options were considered:

Option	Pros	Cons	Recommended
<p><b>Option 1: Approve the Children &amp; Young People Participation Strategy</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic approach to providing quality participation within Slough</li> <li>• Hearing the voices of the children that we work with</li> <li>• Partnership working with other agencies to support children in Slough to have the best opportunities</li> <li>• This is a shared and agreed approach developed through the Children &amp; Young People Partnership Board</li> <li>• A positive view from Ofsted when they next scrutinise Slough Children First services for children which will contribute to a positive judgement</li> <li>• A positive view from the DfE appointed Commissioner on the progress made by Slough Children First</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional time and resource required from staff to ensure that the strategy has meaning</li> </ul>	<p><b>Recommended</b></p>
<p><b>Option 2: Do not approve the Children &amp; Young People Participation Strategy</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No additional time or resource required from staff/partner agencies in addition to 'as is'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children people will continue to feel that their views are not given the appropriate consideration and will feel disenfranchised</li> <li>• A failure to deliver on the aspirations set out the Corporate Plan.</li> <li>• A negative view from Ofsted when they next review or inspect children's services which will adversely influence their judgement.</li> <li>• A negative view from the DfE appointed</li> </ul>	<p><b>Not recommended</b></p>

		Commissioner on the progress made by the Council and Slough Children First in relation to improving children's services.	
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## 5. Background

- 5.1. Slough has one of the youngest populations in England as almost 28% of the population are aged under 18 and need to be engaged in developing and shaping the services they receive. Children offer a unique perspective of matters of importance to them, their peers and for their Borough – those views matter and we should actively look for all opportunities to engage with children and young people in developing, implementing and reviewing what we do.
- 5.2. In the January 2023 ILACS inspection the children told inspectors ‘They as us, we tell them, they don’t listen. So, what is the point?’
- 5.3. What else have children told us?
- They want to be involved in activities within the LA – from interviews to events
  - They want opportunities for their own personal development.
  - They want to be heard – they want their feedback to be put into action
  - They want to know why decisions are being made about them and for them
  - They want to be able to help shape the service
  - They want feedback on the suggestions that they are making
  - They want to feel as though they matter
- 5.4. What do staff tell us?
- They want to hear what children think.
  - They want to be part of innovative ways of supporting children
  - They want to be able to use their skills in a way which adds value, often outside their substantive job role.
  - They want to know what they can do better in their role to support children and young people.
- 5.5. This strategy has been written in conjunction with partner agencies to significantly strengthen the participation offer that is currently in place. This will be via several routes but overseen by the Children and Young People Partnership Board.
- 5.6. What is the strategy? The strategy has four core values and underlying principles:
- Supportive - being clear about the decisions being made and why.
  - Innovative – allowing a creative space for involvement and celebrating successes
  - Respectful – treating everyone with respect and respective privacy
  - Collaborative – Working together, not making assumptions, and allowing everyone to be involved no matter what their background and ability

- 5.7. We will measure the success of this strategy by monitoring -
- Levels of engagement in groups is increased.
  - The Child's voice is more evident in all work.
  - Case studies of practice will have a clear footprint of co-production and the voice of the children.
  - Children will say they feel heard.
  - Teams within the LA understand their roles in participation and pro-actively look for opportunities to engage.

## **6. Financial Implications**

- 6.1. There are no ongoing financial implications from this proposal. Slough Children First have received a grant from the Department of Education of £60,000 to contribute to participation activities in 23/24. This will support one-off activities in 23/24 to develop the participation champion programme, branding, marketing and launch of the strategy and training and increasing awareness. Post 23/24, participation activities will be undertaken by the participation officer that is already costed in the established workforce of Slough Children First.

## **7. Legal implications**

- 7.1. Under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – Article 12 ‘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.’
- 7.2. Article 23 states ‘a child with a disability has the right to live a full and decent life with dignity and, as far as possible, independence and to play and active part in their community’.
- 7.3. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 introduced statutory corporate parenting principles, which local authorities must have regard to whenever they exercise a function in relation to looked after children and care experienced young people. Whilst these duties only apply to local authorities, there is an expectation that partner agencies understand their role in assist in applying the principles to the services they provide. There is a strong emphasis within the principles of encouraging children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings and taking these into account when making decisions. These principles should not be exercised in a formulaic way and instead should be embedded into the culture of the Council. A strategy focused on participation enables the Council and its partners to plan and implement an approach that puts these children and young people at the heart of decision-making.
- 7.4. The Children and Families Act 2014 introduced a new statutory framework from supporting children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. Section 19 of the Act requires local authorities, in carrying out their functions under the Act, to have regard to the views, wishes and feelings of the child or young person and the importance of the child or young person participating as fully as possible in decisions, including being provided with information and support necessary to enable participation in those decisions. This is wider than involvement in individual decisions, instead including participation in planning, commissioning and reviewing services.

## **8. Risk management implications**

- 8.1. Legal – the Council fails to comply with its overarching duties for children and young people
- 8.2. Financial – the Council's services do not adequately address need leading to more expensive crisis intervention.
- 8.3. Operational – children and young people do not feel heard and therefore stop providing feedback, leading to poorer outcomes and services.
- 8.4. Regulatory – Ofsted fail to see adequate improvement, leading to the services being deemed inadequate or failing to improve at the necessary pace.

## **9. Environmental implications**

- 9.1. None identified.

## **10. Equality implications**

## **11. Procurement implications**

- 11.1. There are no procurement implications from this proposal. However, it should be noted that there may be a requirement for specialist support to deliver specific elements in the future.

## **12. Workforce implications**

- 12.1. No negative implications. This approach will support a more involved, engaged and challenged workforce who are able to hear and respond to the voices, thoughts and feelings of the children and young people that they work with.

## **13. Property implications**

- 13.1. There are no property implications

## **14. Background Papers**

None