



## **Children's Safeguarding and Family Help**

Participation strategy

## 1 Introduction

*Participation is the ongoing process of information sharing and dialogue between service users and professionals based on mutual respect where service users are able to contribute to decision-making and shape outcomes.*

The CSFH Participation strategy sets out how we engage with children, young people and families in a relational manner so that we can empower them to take part in decision-making as well as in service development. It should be read together with the *Children's Consultation and Participation* policy: [Children's Consultation and Participation](#)

## 2 Principles of participation

- Participation will be meaningful rather than tokenistic, so that the child or parent/carer is actively taking part in decision making rather than being merely present.
- All participation activities will have a clearly identified goal so that is possible to measure success against this goal and see if the outcome has been achieved and will be undertaken only where it benefits the child.
- Methods of participation will be appropriate to the circumstances of the family and the age and understanding of the child.
- Participation will be based on open, honest working relationships with parents and children, ensuring those facing barriers are empowered and enabled to participate.
- Social workers will support children to develop the skills they need to participate and self-advocate, so that they are able to work with professionals, understand power structures, navigate the system and negotiate better outcomes.
- Children and parents will be given a full explanation as to how and why they can participate in decision-making and how their views will be taken into account. Social workers will use accessible, jargon-free language so that service users are able to participate.
- Social workers will be clear in explaining the extent to which the wishes of children and parents will be actioned by Camden and a clear explanation given when it is not possible for Camden to act on these.

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- From the age of 12 onwards, young people should be encouraged to take a more active role in making decisions so that they can start to take increasing control and responsibility over their lives by the age of 16-18, in preparation for adulthood.

### 3 People involved in participation

- The Participation Unit is responsible for providing the structures for service user consultation and participation and facilitating collective participation events and for ensuring the collection of feedback on services from children and parents.
- Social workers and team managers are responsible for facilitating children and parents' participation in social work processes on individual cases and ensuring they can take part in collective participation activities.
- For looked after children, the Fostering team is responsible for ensuring supervising social workers support foster carers to facilitate children's participation and that foster carers are able to participate in the development of the service.
- Service managers and senior management are responsible for oversight of the CSFH Participation strategy and monitoring its implementation.
- The Participation Engagement Group is responsible for co-ordinating and planning participation activities across children's social care services and monitoring outcomes from these activities.
- Strategy and commissioning are responsible for co-ordinating and planning consultation and feedback from service users on commissioned CSFH services.

### 4 How we achieve participation

#### 4.1 Individual participation on cases

This is done by:

- collecting individual feedback from children on their views about how their case is progressing via consultation forms completed before reviews
- collecting individual feedback from parents of CLA prior to the review meeting
- collecting feedback from parents taking part in all meetings through questionnaires about how they felt the meeting went

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- getting feedback from children and parents on assessments and updated assessments and recording their views on the assessment records
- ensuring the views of children and parents are discussed during case supervision and recorded on the case supervision record
- signposting children and families to advocacy services
- using feedback from complaints.

### **4.2 Collective participation for service development and improvement**

The following provide opportunities for participation and co-production for all children's social care services:

- *Young Inspectors* - an annual programme open to all children known to CSFH who are selected to carry out inspections of a wide range of CSFH and other services with the recommendations used to adapt and improve services.
- *The Children in Care Council (CiCC)* – a forum open to all looked after children who wish to be part of a group that represents the interests of children in care and care leavers and ensures their voice is heard by senior managers and councillors at the Corporate Parenting Board and other council meetings.
- The annual CYPDS consultation with children, young people and parents.
- *Camden Parent Council* – a forum open to all Camden parents who want to influence council services and which welcomes input from CSFH service users.
- *The Family Advisory Board* – a forum set up by the Family Group Conference service which is open to all parents and kinship carers to discuss their shared experiences and develop ways in which they can contribute to service development.
- *Camden life stories events* that enable social workers to hear first-hand about service user's experiences of CSFH.
- The Fostering Service run various *support groups for foster carers and their families* that contribute to developments in fostering practice and service delivery.
- *The Annual CLA achievement event* is organised by the Virtual School to celebrate the academic achievements of looked after children.

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- *Total Respect training* for social workers and foster carers run by looked after children and care experienced young people to ensure workers understand how to make the child's voice heard.
- *The Reactive Forum* that provides opportunities for young people aged 13 to 18 who have learning disabilities to be proactive in getting involved in decision making in order to have a voice about the services they receive and influence decisions about services.
- Recruitment and selection of senior management; a panel of children who receive services from CSFH are part of the selection panel for senior management posts and interview candidates.
- The Care Leavers Advisory Board.

The following provide opportunities for participation and co-production for all council and London-wide services:

- commissioning consultations on pathways accommodation and health provision
- the annual Take-over Challenge
- youth councils
- annual events such as Real Talk and Shout Out
- the pan-London Children in Care Council.

### **4.3 Information for parents and children**

A key part of enabling participation is to provide information about services and how children, parents and carers can take part and get involved and get their voice heard.

We aim to provide parents and children with a number of methods to access information on subjects such as child protection conferences, becoming looked after and assessments so that they know what to expect, for example:

- information leaflets for parents and children
- an online hub containing information for parents about how we will work with them
- an online provision for children *Backchat* and the Backchat newsletter that has a lot of information on participation and getting involved.

#### 4.4 Providing advocates

We aim to encourage and enable children and parents attending CSFH case meetings and reviews to get help from trained advocates to make sure their voice is heard. Details of our advocacy offer can be found at: [Advocacy | Children's Policy & Practice Hub](#)

#### 4.5 Participation groups

The CSFH Participation and Engagement group oversees participation and engagement activity across children's social care and is responsible for developing and co-ordinating individual and collective participation in CSFH and across Camden and monitoring the outcomes of participation activity.

It is led by the Participation Unit with representatives from each social work team, the Virtual School, the Fostering service and the IRO service. The group meets quarterly to look at themes and issues arising from participation in CSFH services and supports the work of Children In Care Council and other children's forums, and has links with the Corporate Parenting Group.

The Participation Unit also links with user engagement representatives from the Young People's Housing pathway to ensure housing keyworkers have an opportunity to share ideas and ensure young people from the pathway have opportunities to take part in activities and have their voices heard.

### 5 Participation in assessments

Involving parents and children in the assessment process in a meaningful way can improve the quality of information gathered and therefore better inform decisions and interventions.

Our standards for participation in assessments are:

- The voice of the child must be heard through assessment and children must have an opportunity to contribute in order to get a sense of what is going on in their lives.
- The assessment planning process should be used to ensure the family's participation, including what scales and questionnaires will be used. How the family's participation was facilitated should be recorded on the assessment record.
- Parents should be given a clear explanation of the purpose of assessment and how it will be conducted and the *Listening to you* leaflet provided. [listening-to-you-assessment-leaflet-for-families.pdf](#)

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- During the planning process, social workers need to get clarity regarding the care of the child and whether this is split between parents or other family members in order to make sure that anyone who has any responsibility for the care of the child is involved in the assessment.

## 6 Participating in meetings and reviews

### Parents

Parents need to participate in review meetings in order to provide vital information on how well the child's plan is being implemented and whether it is improving outcomes.

- Generally, parents will be invited to all professional meetings relating to their child apart from strategy meetings and social workers should take active steps to ensure their attendance and that they are able to participate.
- The Children and Young People's Disability Service will encourage parents to attend the Short Breaks Panel meeting to ensure they have an opportunity to be involved in developing or changing care packages and to be able to challenge when a service is likely to be ended.
- Prior to any review, parents should be involved in updating the assessment and should be formally consulted and their views sought using the relevant consultation form.
- Staff and IROs who chair review meetings should ensure they meet with parents prior to the meeting to discuss how the meeting will be conducted and what will be discussed, check they have received any reports and updated assessments and obtain their views.
- Following the meeting, parents should be invited to complete a questionnaire to gather their views on how they felt the meeting went.
- Excluding parents from meetings should be an exceptional occurrence and should only occur under the following circumstances.
  - For CIN reviews the chair may decide parents should be excluded only if their presence would seriously disrupt the meeting.
  - For statutory CLA reviews, the IRO may decide to exclude parents only in line with the *Looked After Reviews* policy. [Looked After Reviews](#)
  - For child protection conferences, the chair may decide

to exclude parents only in line with section 4.5 of the London Safeguarding Children Board child protection procedures.

## Children

- In general, children over the age of 4 will be routinely involved and enabled to participate. For younger children, social workers will need to rely on observation and reports from parents, carers and other professionals as to the child's wishes and feelings.
- All children over the age of 4 should be consulted prior to meetings where their plan will be reviewed in order to get their views. The relevant consultation forms should be completed by the child with guidance and support from a trusted adult such as parents, social workers or foster carers. The forms are available at. [Consultation | Children's Policy & Practice Hub](#)
- All looked after children aged over 4 should be encouraged to attend their statutory review.
- Children aged 11 years and over who are subject to a child protection plan may attend the review conference if this is thought to be appropriate by their social worker and the chair of the conference.
- Staff and IROs who chair review meetings will ensure they meet with children prior to the meeting to discuss how the meeting will be conducted and what will be discussed, check they have had an opportunity to complete their consultation forms and to obtain their views.
- The Children and Young People's Disability Service will encourage parents and children to attend the Short Breaks Panel meeting to ensure they have an opportunity to be involved in developing or changing care packages and to be able to challenge when a service is likely to be ended.
- The Fostering and Kinship Service will encourage looked after children to be involved in the annual review of their foster carer, with supervising social workers liaising with LAC social workers to arrange a consultation to gain the child's views.