

<b>Item No 7</b>	<b>Classification:</b> Open	<b>Date:</b> September 10 2007	<b>Meeting Name:</b> Corporate Parenting Committee
<b>Report title:</b>		Participation Strategy for Children Looked After	
<b>Ward(s) or groups affected:</b>		All	
<b>From:</b>		Strategic Director of Children's Services	

## **RECOMMENDATION**

1. The Committee is asked to note the content of this report and agree the arrangements for the Committee's sessions with representatives of Speakerbox, as set out at paragraph 17.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

2. The Children's Services Department is committed to promoting the active engagement of Children Looked After (CLA) in the design, delivery and review of services for CLA in Southwark. To promote this work the Children's Specialist Services Team has developed a participation strategy and action plan for 2007/2008. This report sets out the key areas of on-going and new work by the team and outlines the role and responsibilities of the Committee.
3. The "Every Child Matters" agenda recognises the importance of involving CLA in every aspect of the design of the service they receive. The participation strategy outlines the approach and implementation to seek meaningful participation, at the heart of service design, delivery and on-going evaluation.
4. This includes:
  - Embedding participation in the Corporate Parenting Committee;
  - Supporting freestanding CLA groups (Speakerbox);
  - Delivering targeted consultation processes for service re-design or evaluation; and
  - Deepening individual participation for all CLA in their own arrangements.
5. Southwark's Children and Young People's Plan, which states, "If services are to become more child and family centred we need to develop their role as advocates and co-producers", underpins the strategy.

## **KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION**

### Benefits of Participation

6. For the Council and its partners benefits include:

- Information can be gained from children and young people as citizens and service users about their changing attitudes and needs, their views as to what constitutes quality in service provision and barriers to accessing services;
  - Children and young people can bring fresh perspectives and new ideas about services, policies and democratic processes, helping tackle key objectives and promoting social inclusion; and
  - Services and policies can be designed, delivered and evaluated based on actual rather than presumed needs.
7. For children and young people being actively involved in a meaningful participation process can help them build on existing skills and develop new ones, increasing confidence and self-esteem. They may better understand particular organisations and how to influence them and can benefit from new and better services that have changed and improved in response to their needs.
  8. Such a strategy also has benefits for the wider community, as it is evidence of a more vibrant local democracy, which actively involves children and young people and raises their aspirations. Community cohesion is fostered through the inclusion of children and young people in local decision-making.

#### Strategic Development

9. The key aim of the participation strategy is to ensure that children, young people and their families are actively involved in shaping decisions and service developments that affect their lives.
10. The Children's Specialist Services Team will establish clear communication channels with all CLA. CLA will have a clear understanding of how to communicate with their social worker/carer and how to access specific additional support, i.e. advocates, independent visitors, consultation groups (incl. Speakerbox) and complaints. The Team will ensure that all staff involved in making decisions that may affect CLA will receive appropriate training to ensure they understand how to incorporate participative practice effectively into their work.
11. The Team will seek to take into account CLA's opinions when making decisions. CLA will be actively involved in making decisions, which affect them as well as setting the agenda about issues they feel are relevant. CLA receive appropriate expenses for contributing to decision-making.

#### Measuring Outcomes

12. The Team will develop an evaluation process, to review the effectiveness of participation work and consultation, and will feedback to the people who were involved. CLA will be involved in the evaluation process and consequently will be able to influence how participation practice evolves. They will receive thorough feedback about their input.
13. The Hear by Right (HbR) national standard assessment tool will be used to assess the active involvement of children and young people. HbR is based upon self-assessment and is divided into three levels: Emerging, Established, Advanced where each level builds on the last. The self-assessment tool is used

to establish:

- The number of children and young people involved;
- A project outline;
- What children and young people have said;
- What the organisation did in response;
- Changes that have occurred as a result of participation; and
- An assessment of the quality of participation.

This process will feed into the HbR process implemented by Young Southwark for all children in Southwark.

14. Children and young people should be able to report back that the process of involvement made them feel:
- Respected;
  - Listened to;
  - Included;
  - Empowered; and
  - That relationships are improved.

### Implementation

15. An implementation group has been established, which includes the Children's Rights Officer, representatives from Speakerbox, the Independent Reviewing Officer Team and CLA Services. This group will have responsibility for implementing the strategy action plan.
16. The action plan will be implemented under four key areas:
- (a) Mechanisms in place through which CLA can participate fully in service planning in the following areas:
- Decisions which personally affect that child or young person;
  - Service development;
  - Service evaluation; and
  - Service commissioning.
- (b) Development of knowledge and skills of CLA concerning participation so they can fully utilise the opportunities open to them.
- (c) Development of the workforce to ensure they possess the skills and understanding to fully integrate successful participation.
- (d) Monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of these participation processes and strategy.

### Role of the Corporate Parenting Committee

17. The Committee will receive an annual report on the delivery of the participation strategy and action plan. In addition, the Committee will meet twice per annum with Speakerbox to discuss and provide input into the Committee's agreed work plan, provide feedback on agreed initiatives and make recommendations for future areas for development. These sessions will be facilitated. It is proposed to hold the first session on 25 October 2007 and the second session during the first week of the Easter school holiday 2008.

### **Community Impact Statement**

18. The participation strategy has been designed to ensure the involvement of all CLA. The implementation group will consider the individual needs of children and young people and identify barriers and seek to overcome those that may prevent them fully participating. The evaluation work resulting from this strategy will enhance the wider participation framework developed by Young Southwark.

### **Resource implications**

19. The financial and staffing resources related to the implementation of this strategy are contained within the agreed budgets of the Department.

### **Consultation**

20. Children and young people, partners and relevant stakeholders were widely consulted on the CYPP, which underpins this strategy and Speakerbox has been involved in the development of the strategy for the participation of CLA.

### **SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS**

21. No supplementary advice has been sought from other officers.

### **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

<b>Background Papers</b>	<b>Held At</b>	<b>Contact</b>
Young Southwark Children and Young People's Plan  Children Looked after Participation Strategy and Action Plan 2007-2008	Children's Services Department, 49 Grange Walk London, SE1 3DY	Laura McGinlay 020 7525 0404

### **AUDIT TRAIL**

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<b>Version</b>	Final

<b>Dated</b>	30 August 2007	
<b>Key Decision?</b>	No	
<b>CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / EXECUTIVE MEMBER</b>		
<b>Officer Title</b>	<b>Comments Sought</b>	<b>Comments included</b>
Director of Legal and Democratic Services	No	No
Director of Finance	No	No
<b>Executive Member</b>	Yes	Yes
<b>Date final report sent to Constitutional/Community Council/Scrutiny Team</b>		31/08/07