



**Children's Specialist Services  
Children Looked After  
Participation Strategy 2009 – 2011**

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## Executive Summary

This strategy outlines the commitment of Children’s Specialist Services to the active engagement of looked-after children in the design, delivery and review of services for looked-after children in Southwark.

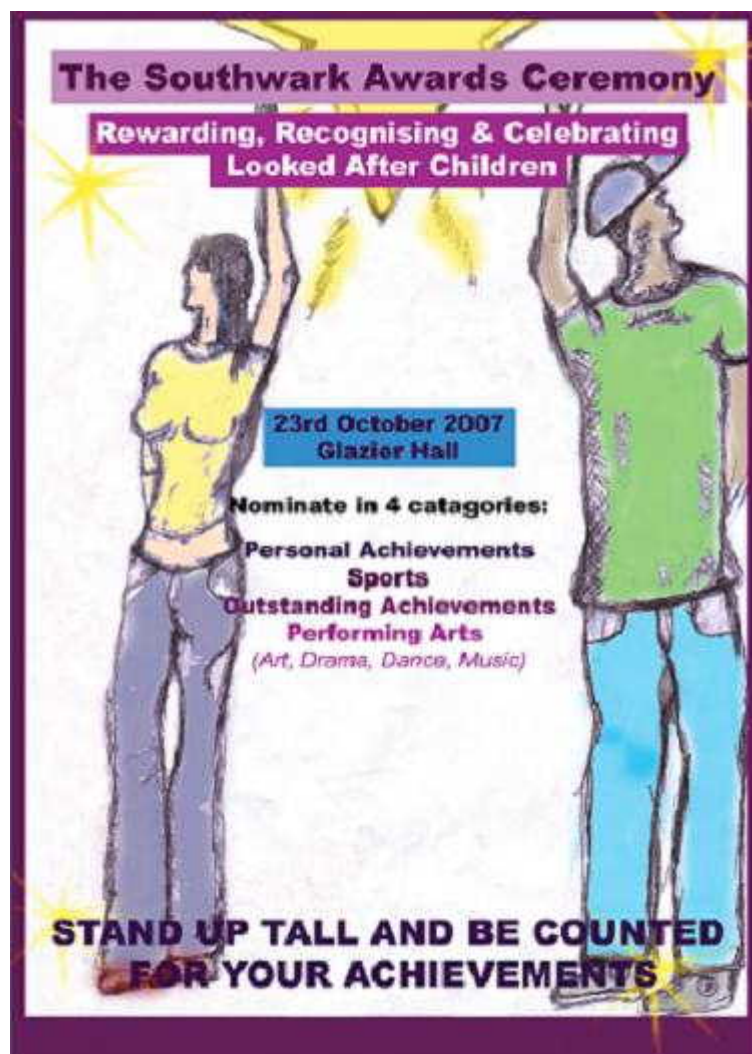
Children’s Specialist Services are part of Children’s Services with lead responsibilities for providing assessment, safeguarding and family support / early intervention services. When required, Specialist Services such as Youth Offending, integrated services for children with special needs and looked-after services are provided.

The Specialist Service for children looked-after is the lead business unit for delivering the participation strategy for children in Southwark’s care.

Children’s Specialist Services are committed to the “Every Child Matters” and “Care Matters” agenda and recognise the importance of involving looked-after children in every aspect of the service. This strategy outlines the approach and implementation to seek meaningful participation at the heart of service design and ongoing evaluation.

The participation strategy includes:

- Imbedding participation with the Corporate Parenting Committee
- Support freestanding CLA group (Speakerbox)
- Deliver targeted consultation processes for service re-design or evaluation
- Deepen individual participation for all looked-after children in their own care arrangements



## Information and Background

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The purpose of Specialist Services Participation Strategy for looked-after children is to develop appropriate and inclusive mechanisms to ensure all children and young people are engaged in forming decisions that effect their lives and futures. This strategy is underpinned by Southwark's Children and Young Persons Plan, which states:

“ If services are to become more child and family centred we need to develop their role as advocates and co-producers.”

This strategy is underpinned by wider national and international developments as follows:

- The United Nation's Conventions on the rights of the child, article 12, states that children and young people have a right to express their views and a right being informed about and participating in achieving their rights.
- The Children Act 1998 confirmed that the welfare of the child is paramount and that one of the core principles is that in all cases the wishes and feelings of children and young people should be established.
- The 2004 act sets out the legislative framework, which implemented the “Every Child Matters” agenda.
- Care Matters identifies specific standards for Corporate Parenting (Getting it Right).

Decision-making practice has evolved in recent years with a move to greater transparency and openness in decision-making and public accountability to access information about services. Additionally, involving service user groups in decision-making as a tool to service improvement and reaching ‘hard to reach groups’ is becoming increasingly common.

“Every Child Matters” makes it clear the need for a skilled and effective work force to be able to deliver integrated services and achieve better outcomes through the children's workforce strategy. Southwark's workforce strategy recognises participation as a key factor in delivering better outcomes for children.

Young Southwark requires children and young people to be allowed to participate in decision-making. This is central to delivering all five outcome areas and will be subject to inspection by the proposal new Ofsted inspection regime.

### Children in care to the London Borough of Southwark

#### Population

- 62,000 children and young people age 0 – 19 live in the Borough and the 0 – 14 population is forecasted to grow by app. 21% by 2016.
- At the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2009, there were 552 children looked-after by the London Borough of Southwark.
- Under the leaving care legislation, the children looked-after service is providing support to a further 404 care leavers until they reach the age of 21 (or 24 if in further education or university).

#### Age Groupings

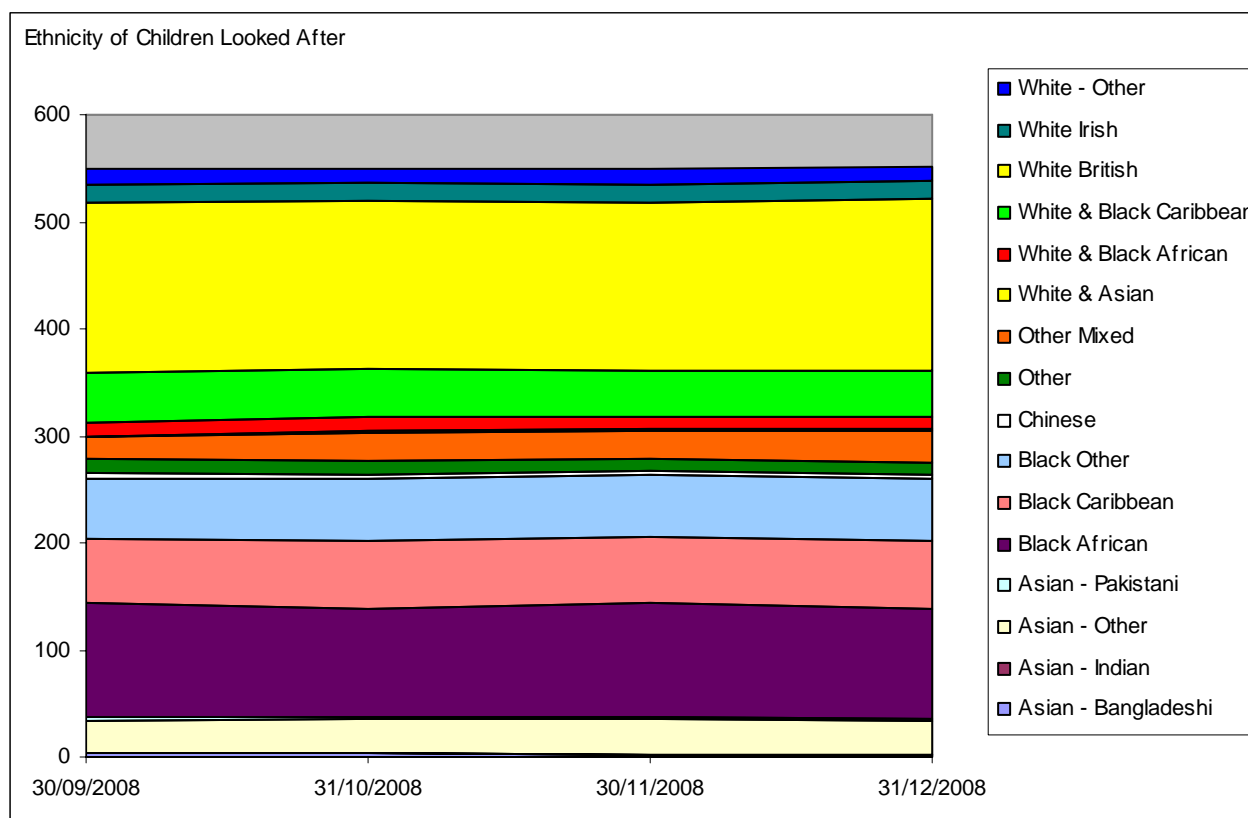
The current children looked-after population can be broken down as follows:

- Pre-School: 0 – 4
- Statutory school age: 5 – 16
- Pathway planning (EET)
- Unaccompanied minors
- Aftercare Support Services

#### Gender

There are slightly higher numbers of boys than girls in Southwark's care (Boys: 309, Girls: 243)

Ethnic culture and diversity



Children with disabilities

There is a small number of children in care (29 as at 1<sup>st</sup> January 2009) who have a significant and profound disability. These children and young people receive the full range of services for children looked-after from the newly established integrated service for children with special needs located at the Sunshine House.

Placement arrangements

It is a statutory requirement that looked-after children are placed in an environment, which meets their needs. Unless multi-agency assessments indicate that a young person requires specialist residential provision, Southwark is committed to placing looked-after children within a family environment.

Some young people may opt as part of their pathway plan to move into semi-independence preparation placements prior to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.

The placement of young people as at 1<sup>st</sup> of April 07 is as follows:

– Children placed with approved foster carers .....	361
– Children placed with approved members of their extended family .....	36
– Children placed at home with their parents as part of a rehabilitation plan .....	9
– Children placed in specialist residential provision .....	41
– Children placed in semi-independent accommodation .....	80
– Children placed for adoption .....	17
– Remand / Prison .....	4
– Mother and baby .....	4
<b>Total .....</b>	<b>552</b>

Southwark performs very strongly against its comparators regarding the percentages of children placed with families and within seven miles of their home address.

## Partnership Working and Shared Values

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The “Every Child Matters” agenda sets out five key outcomes by which the local authorities are required to improve children’s wellbeing:

Being Healthy Staying Safe Enjoying and Achieving Economic Wellbeing Making a Positive Contribution

Partnership working is key to the achievement of these objectives, both in terms of initial implementation and ongoing success.

The active involvement of children and their families is guided by Young Southwark’s shared values for participation:

- Best interest of the child: Participation is viewed as an enabling process that allows children to become involved in ensuring the highest quality of service provision for all young people. This aims to achieve the ‘best interest of the child’, which supports the fundamental principle of the UN-CRC – The emphasis on the welfare and development of children.
- Visible commitment: Participation of children and young people is a visible commitment that is properly resourced, evaluated and continuously developed and improved.
- Mutual cooperation, respect and trust: Participation involves cooperation from both children and adults. Central to this is the importance of respect and trust to ensure successful cooperation so that both parties benefit from the process. Cooperation removes doubt, increases honesty and the child reaching common goals.
- Equal opportunity: Children and young people have equal opportunity to be involved. Methods of engagement are adjusted to meet diverse level of needs and help build skills and capacity for looked-after children.

## Benefits of Participation

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The Children’s Act 2004, the “Every Child Matters” and “CareFirst” agenda states that outcomes for children must be improved. These outcomes can also benefit the organisation and the community.

### Benefits for the organisation and its partners

- Information can be gained from children and young people as citizens and customers 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.
- Services and policies can be designed, delivered and evaluated based on actual rather than presumed needs.

### Benefits for children and young people

- Children and young people can build on existing skills and develop new ones, increasing confidence and self-esteem.
- Children and young people may better understand particular organisations and how to influence them.
- Children and young people benefit from new and better services that have changed and improved in response to their needs.

### Benefits for the wider community

- A more vibrant local democracy through the active involvement of children and young people.
- Community cohesion is fostered through the inclusion of children and young people in local decision-making.
- An empowering environment that raises aspirations among children and young people and the wider community.

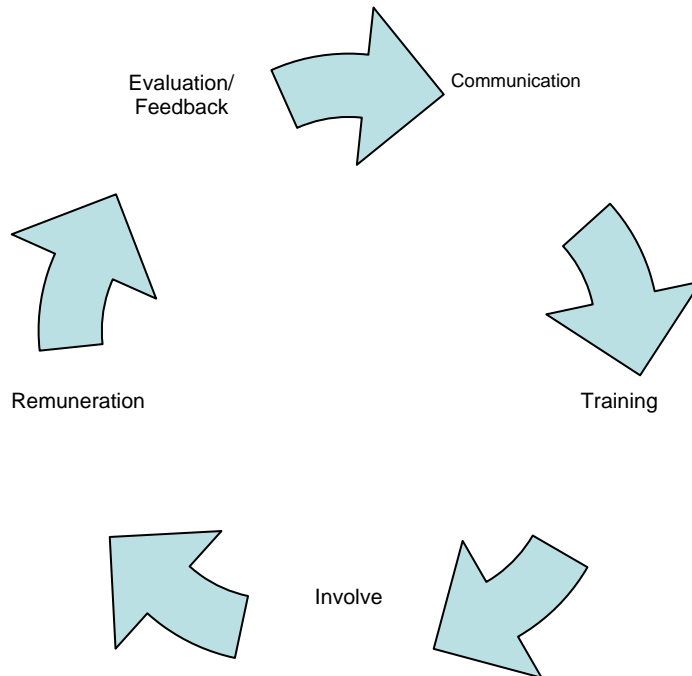
# Strategic Development

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## Outcomes

The key aim of the Participation Strategy is:

**To ensure that children, young people and care leavers are actively involved in shaping decisions and service developments that affect their lives.**



## Communication

Children's Specialist Services will maintain clear communication channels with all looked-after children. Looked-after children 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. Children in care will receive membership cards outlining their expectations and affirming the council's pledge.

## Training

Children's Specialist Services will ensure that all staff involved in making decisions that may affect Young People will be trained to understand how to incorporate participative practise effectively into their work. Looked-after children will benefit from staff being better at involving them in decision-making. Looked-after children will be more involved shaping and delivering staff and student social work training.

## Involvement

Children's Specialist Services will seek to take into account young people's opinions when making decisions. Looked-after children will be actively involved in making decisions, which affect them as well as setting the agenda about issues they feel are relevant.

## Remuneration

Children's Specialist Services will develop a remuneration policy to ensure fair and consistent remuneration for looked-after children giving their time. Looked-after children will be remunerated for contributing to decision-making.

## **Evaluation**

Children's Specialist Services will develop an evaluation process, which will ensure thorough evaluation of participation work and consultation, and feedback to the people who were involved. Looked-after children 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.

## **Measuring Outcomes**

Children's Specialist Services will be using the Hear by Right (HbR) national standard assessment tool 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. Outlined here is the self-assessment tool:

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

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

## **Evidence of outcomes**

Children and young people should be able to report back that the process of involvement made them feel:

- Respected
- Listened to
- Included
- Empowered
- Relationships are improved.

There should also be longer-term improved outcomes for those who took part and generally for all looked-after children. As a result, children and young people's involvement should contribute towards them

Being healthy    Staying Safe    Enjoying and Achieving    Making a Positive Contribution

Examples of positive outcomes would be:

1. Children and young people's views are considered in the development of policy and services that impact upon them.
2. Children and young people are given the opportunity to develop their skills in order to maximise their ability to participate.
3. Workforce development and training will ensure that all staff gain thorough understanding of the principles of participation and the ability to properly integrate participation practice and participation is a key objective in the development of a workforce strategy.
4. Children and young people are able to effectively evaluate services wherever possible. They also receive thorough feedback.
5. Children and young people are involved in different types of decision-making.
6. Children and young people are consistently remunerated for participation.
7. Children looked-after are fully involved in their care plans.



# Implementation and Overview

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## Implementation

An participation 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 leadership responsibilities for implementing the action plan and will be able to escalate any implementation issue to the Assistant Director for Children's Specialist Services.

## Strategic Overview: Role of Corporate Parenting Committee

The Corporate Parenting Committee will receive an annual report about the delivery of the participation strategy and action plan. In addition to the annual report, the Committee will meet twice per year with Speakerbox to discuss and provide input into the Committee's agreed work plan, provide feedback as to agreed initiatives and make recommendations for future areas for development. These sessions will be facilitated.

## Actions to Achieve Outcomes

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To ensure Children's Specialist Services achieve this vision, a detailed action plan will be implemented under four key action areas:

1. Mechanisms in place through which looked-after children can participate fully in service planning for looked-after children (ref. CYPP and Children Looked-After Business Plan).
  - Decisions which personally affect looked-after children
  - Service Development
  - Service evaluation
  - Service commissioning
2. Development of knowledge and skills of looked-after children concerning participation so they can fully exploit the opportunities open to them.
3. Development of the workforce to ensure they possess the skills and understanding to fully integrate successful participation.

Monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of Children's Specialist Services participation processes and strategy

