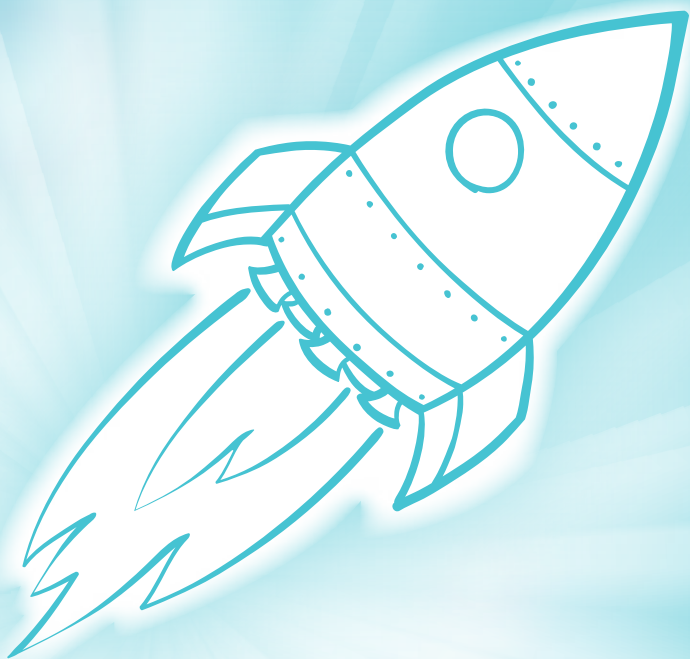


Children's Services Involvement Strategy

Our plan for involving you in your future...



**September 2014 –
May 2017**



Norfolk County Council



Children's Services Leadership Team



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Forewords

In Norfolk we are passionate about the involvement of children and young people in the planning, review and delivery of services. We engage with young people through a number of general forums including the youth parliament work, The In-care council, the Youth Advisory Boards, school Councils and through more specialised work promoted through our approach with Children with Disabilities and Early years.

Involving Children, young people and families is essential to making services fit for the Future and is a responsibility across the workforce for children and young people. We apply the standards enshrined in the UN convention Rights of a Child to our approach and this is articulated in this strategy which is the product of co-production.

Sheila Lock,
Interim Director for Children's Services

The commitment of involving children, young people, families and communities lies at the very heart of everything we do in Children's Services. It simply has to be so, in order to make sure that the services we provide are not only the right ones, but are delivered at the right time and in such a way that they achieve the right outcomes. In Norfolk the voice of the child must always be heard.

Councillor James Joyce,
Chairman and Lead Member for
Norfolk's Children's Services Committee



“This work is important as it will give children, young people families and communities more of a voice. It will allow them to have more of a say about their lives and to sit on decision-making boards. With this new strategy, children and young people will be able to see this document and understand what they could be involved in.”

Barry, 19, member of the group who helped to write the strategy



What is Children's Services?

Children's Services is made up of teams of people who work with and support children, young people and their families.

We are responsible for lots of things, including:

- Working with schools to make sure that they are great places for pupils to learn and develop.
- Preparing children and young people for their future jobs, through education, training and apprenticeships.
- Supporting children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.
- Helping families with children to find the right childcare for them.
- Keeping children and young people safe.
- Working with families to keep children and young people living at home, when this is a safe thing to do.
- Looking after children who can't live with their parents, either on a temporary or long-term basis.

“Children's Services is not just about children, it's about all the services they provide.”



What do we mean by involvement?

We want children, young people, families and people living in communities across Norfolk to be involved in all decisions that are made about them and their lives, as well as the decisions we make about the services we are responsible for.

Children, young people and their families are involved in lots of different decisions about their lives. For example we talk to:

- pupils with Special Educational Needs about what they want to achieve and what support they need to do this.
- children and young people that are looked after about contact with their family, the support they need with their education and how we can keep as many things in their life the same when they come into care.
- parents of young children about what sort of childcare is right for them.

Children, young people and families are also involved in improving the services we are responsible for by:

- interviewing people that want to work for us
- training people that do work for us
- helping us to evaluate what we do and working with us to decide what needs to change
- helping us to decide if we need to create a new service, and if so how it should work
- working with us to decide which companies should get the contracts to run our services.

“You should not just say 'how do you want to be involved' because that's like asking someone how do you want your sea slug cooked... give us choices, help us understand all the ways we could be involved.”



“We used the word ‘you’ in this strategy to make it personal and so you know you matter.”

Why is involvement important?

There are lots of benefits of involving you in what we do:

Children, young people and families living in Norfolk benefit because:

- they get the support they need to be happy, healthy and safe.
- they have greater choice about the services they can use.
- having people of all ages playing an active part in their local community helps to create interesting and better places to live.

Children, young people and adults benefit from being involved because:

- they learn new skills and knowledge, try new experiences and gain confidence.
- their experience will support them to be an active part of their community, for example by volunteering.

Our staff benefit because:

- it helps to make them better at their job because they understand what the children, young people, families and communities they are working with want and need.

The County Council benefits because:

- involving you helps us to spend our money wisely and makes sure that we don’t waste our money on providing services or support that won’t work or that aren’t wanted.

The law also says that we should involve children and young people in our work. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child says when adults are making decisions about their lives, children have the right to say what they think, and have their views taken into account. We want to make sure that we also involve their families and the communities across Norfolk as well.

Our involvement principles

We have developed a set of principles to help us make sure we involve children, young people, families and communities in the right way. **Our principles are:**

- We will make sure that no matter who you are, where you live, what abilities or disabilities you may have, or which services you use, you will have the right to be involved in the work of Children’s Services and the Council on matters that affect you.
- We will always tell you what actions have come from what you have said and how we have changed the plans or thoughts we have had as a result, if we cannot act on what you have said we will explain why.
- We will respect your ability to decide for yourself if a subject is appropriate for you to be involved in and we won’t make assumptions for you.
- We will use a variety of ways to involve you, and make sure that meetings are held at times and places that are right for you.
- We will always make sure that you understand all of the ways that you can be involved so that you can choose the way that best suits you.
- We will make sure you know of all the opportunities to be involved and we will support you to take part.
- We will make sure that both this strategy and all of the involvement work we do is evaluated, and offer you the opportunities to help us do this.

Why do we need a strategy?

We have great examples of how you have changed what we do for the better. Whilst we can be good at involving you in what we do, we don't always do it as well as we would like. We also don't always make it easy for children, young people and families from all backgrounds to be involved.

Ofsted has also told us that we need to be better at talking and listening to children, young people and their families about what they want when decisions are being made about their lives.

We have written this strategy to help us improve how we involve you. We want to make sure that our involvement work is consistent, coordinated and effective. Writing the strategy is the number one priority in our Children and Young People's Plan.

What do we want to achieve in the future?

In future we want to make sure that a broad range of children, young people and families get the chance to work with Children's Services. You will help us to evaluate and improve all parts of our service in a variety of ways that are interesting to you.



The people working with you will have the right skills, knowledge and attitude to make sure that your involvement happens in the best way.

Managers and members of staff will understand how and when to involve you in their everyday work.

You will understand what difference your involvement has made, and we will be clear about why sometimes things that you ask for can't happen.

We will ask you about how well we involve you and what we can do better next time.

How are we going to achieve this?

Our priorities for achieving this are:

- 1 To make sure that children, young people and their families are more involved in decisions that are made about their own lives.
- 2 To make sure that children, young people, families and communities have more opportunities to speak to and directly influence decision makers, such as councillors and managers.
- 3 To give our staff the right training so that they know how and when to involve you.
- 4 Children, young people and their families will help to deliver this training.
- 5 To create a culture amongst our staff where they are continually thinking about how and when they can involve you in their work.
- 6 We will make sure that we put extra effort into making sure children, young people, families and communities that do not usually get involved are encouraged to.

How will we make this happen and how will we know if it is working?

We will create a separate action plan that we can regularly update and change as we make progress and actions are completed. The action plan will include how we will do things, for example, how we will make sure that the voices of groups, children, young people and families that do not feel listened to will be targeted to make sure we understand what they need from us.

“People don't get involvement – this will help them to understand how and when to involve us.”

The action plan will be organised into six month blocks of work and into seven sections. These sections will be the same as the standards in Hear by Right, which is a tool organisations can use for assessing how well they involve children

and young people. We will have a separate monitoring process for those groups of people who would not usually get involved so that we can make sure that our involvement strategy works for everyone in Norfolk.

We will set-up a group of young people and members of staff who will write the action plan. The group will meet regularly to review our progress and assess how well we are performing against the Hear by Right standards. All Children's Services staff will have a role to play in making sure that this strategy is delivered.

“Hold it at times we can be there... professionals give up a weekend or evening.”

How was the Involvement Strategy produced?

Young people were involved from start to finish, from deciding how the strategy should be developed to writing the document. The team that wrote the strategy also included councillors and members of staff at Norfolk County Council. We visited and wrote to a wide range of groups of children, young people and parents/carers to understand what they wanted to be included in the strategy and how they would like to be involved in the Council's work. Children and young people will continue to be involved in measuring the effectiveness of this strategy.

“Our views are important and we need to be included.”





We have pulled together just three examples of work that has happened and that we think will inspire you to think about how you can involve children young people and families in the work that you do...

The promise

Two years ago we launched the pledge to all children and young people in the care of Norfolk County Council. We had heard from a few young people and foster carers that it was not a document that young people felt able to use and so we surveyed all children and young people in care to find out what they thought of it.

The responses were very poor with almost all who responded saying that it was too vague to be of any use and that even the design made it unattractive. We asked some young people, foster carers, social care managers and County Councillors to form a working group to redesign the pledge to make it something that was useful, attractive and easy to use.

The group met every week for five months and in that time completely rewrote the content, renamed it the promise, as young people told us the word pledge means nothing to them, and included their rights as young people in care. The group developed two written versions one for over 16s and one for under 16s and an animated DVD for under 7s and children and young people with learning disabilities. They also wrote guidelines that said every copy must be delivered by the child/young person's social care worker and it must be explained to them. Feedback so far is good, in the first small survey 86% felt it was now a useful document.

By co-producing something with children young people and foster carers we were able to not only get it right but we were able to design it in a way that made it attractive and accessible.

Children with Disabilities (CWD)

The PIP (promoting inclusive provision) project is a new and exciting way of working with children and young people with disabilities. A group of young people from across Norfolk representing a wide variety of voluntary sector organisations, with a wide range of disabilities, including physical, learning and sensory, have developed a way of reviewing projects and organisations that offer activities and groups for CWD. They visit the organisation or building, meet staff, look at the activities on offer, review the building and then with worker support write a report on their findings. The report includes their recommendations on how things could be improved and also highlights what they think works really well. The report is sent to the organisation and to Norfolk County Council. The group then revisits a few months later to look and see if their recommendations have been acted on.

This project has proved so successful, with great benefits both for the young people involved, in gaining new skills and confidence, and the organisations gaining new understanding on the needs and opinions of people using their services that we plan to expand the work of this group. The group are now training as young commissioners and will be involved in commissioning short breaks for all CWD, they will also be helping to write the disabled children's strategy.



Youth Advisory Boards

Norfolk Youth Advisory Boards and Young Commissioners

Critical to the development of the Youth Advisory Boards has been the involvement of young people, ensuring that their voice is at the heart of decision making.

Teams of Young Commissioners have been established in each YAB area with 187 young people trained to date.



Role and function of Young Commissioners

The role of Young Commissioners is to:

- Assist the YAB in developing its commissioning approach through analysing needs data and setting commissioning priorities.
- Lead on the approval process for awarding contracts for commissioned projects and the monitoring of projects.
- Enable Norfolk County Council to report on the sufficiency of the local youth offer.



Impact of the Young Commissioners

A view from a young person

"Since I have joined YAB I have learnt and developed new skills. I have met many new people. I have gained skills such as group conversation, interviews and in depth discussions. I have become more confident when it comes to talking to people in groups along with voicing my opinion in a confident way."

Becca 17 – Attleborough

A view from an organisation

"Working with the South Norfolk YAB has given SN CCG a vital insight into the priorities young commissioners and young people have in the District, especially those that impact on health and wellbeing. SN CCG's involvement with the YAB has been reflected in its strategic planning – for instance, raising the importance of Mental Health services and information for young people."

**Oliver Cruickshank, Engagement Lead,
South Norfolk Clinical Commissioning Group**

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The working group

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