

Somerset Participation Strategy

2024-2030

**'All children have a right to have their
voices heard and taken into account'**

- UNCRC: Article 12



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Executive Summary

The purpose of this strategy is to set out our commitment to and standards for participation and engagement across the county.

For a number of years there has been a commitment to hearing the voice of children and young people, with many examples of excellent practice. This strategy aims to embed this good practice to ensure that children and young people's individual and collective voices make an impact on the design and delivery of the services that affect them. This will also include influencing the improvements required by the Somerset Children and Young People's Plan 2024-2030. This acknowledges that we may hold individual organisational participation strategies and that this strategy seeks to encompass the participation and engagement work of members collectively across Somerset.

The strategy was developed in consultation with a small number of children and young people, and participation workers from across the partnership. It sets out:

- What we mean by participation
- The legal and statutory framework for participation
- The benefits of participation
- Participation practice requirements
- Plan of action



What we mean by participation

Participation is about making opportunities for children, young people and their families to be involved in processes for decision making on issues that affect them. This means listening to what matters to them most and taking their views seriously.

We use the term participation not simply to mean 'taking part' or 'being present' but as having some influence over decisions and action.

Participation is not just about working with children, young people and their families on matters that are high on adults' agendas. Children, young people and their families should have opportunities to set and decide their own agendas. They must be given opportunities and support to share their views in both personal and public decisions.

For more information visit the [Participation Toolkit](#)



How we participate

Informing

Organisations give clear, early messages to the community about the opportunities for children, young people and their families/carers to participate and engage, the reasons for doing this and the skills, knowledge, diversity and experience needed, whether training is available and the accessibility of the engagement. At all stages participants are kept updated.

This can be done by presentations and talking to groups, one- to- one interviews, public meetings, networking events, user panels, on-line groups and written information in the form of leaflets or websites.

It is important to help children and young people feel that they are supported to be informed.

Discussions

Organisations carry out conversations when there is going to be a significant change to children and young people's services, particularly if the changes have significant impact on children and young people's ability to access or receive the benefits of the proposed change to services. A conversation makes sure that the voices of children, young people and their families are reflected in decisions being made about the proposed changes.

Listening

Organisations have identified all the ways that children, young people and their families can become involved in looking at ways to improve services from networking events, customer satisfaction, staff recruitment, mystery shopping, contributing to strategy and policy and working on commissioning processes.

Doing it together (co-design and co-produce)

Organisations create an environment of trust and respect with children, young people and their families, which draws on personal experiences to be able to work together creatively and productively from start to finish. This gives an honest insight into the care and support they are receiving and lays a template for both individual care and service improvement. All views are equal, and all participants will be given the information they need to make informed decisions. Solutions are created, overseen and reviewed by the whole of the group.

For more information visit the [Participation Toolkit](#)



Legal and statutory framework for participation

The principle that the wishes and views of children and young people should contribute to both individual case decisions and service improvement is enshrined in the Children Act (2004), Children and Social Work Act (2017), Health and Social Care Act (2022), Children and Families Act (2014), HMIC inspection guidance (2022), Safeguarding Services (HM Government 2022), Young People's Public Health Framework (2015), Ofsted Single Inspection Framework (2022), as well as Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023).



The benefits of participation

Participation can help children, young people and their families to:

- Develop important and useful skills and feel valued and included
- Have a real say in shaping their own lives
- Have opportunities to achieve accredited training
- Get services that can meet their changing needs and hopes
- Have opportunities to share their views
- Be valued in their communities
- Get better and more relevant services
- Be seen as and valued as citizens
- Feel better about themselves, and their abilities
- Build on existing skills and develop new ones
- Have the good things which they do shared

Collaboration framework

Listen to (involve)

We will listen and record your thoughts and consider these as part of our work.

This will include surveys, website feedback, question and answer sessions, listening events, Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS), complaints and social media.

Discuss with (participate)

We will have a conversation with you, so that your thoughts are reflected in the decisions made. We will work together with you to understand your experiences and exchange ideas.

This will include focus groups and themed meetings. This should be a process that happens over time.

Do together (co-design/co-produce)

Participants will be involved from start to finish. We will work together with you to make decisions, design visions, activities and solutions with you not for you. All views are equal regardless of professional status and all participants will be given the information they need to make informed decisions. Solutions are created, overseen and reviewed by the whole group.

Inform

At all stages we will keep you updated

Feedback

We will tell you how your involvement has been used and the outcomes. You will be able to see the difference that your involvement has made.

This will include follow up emails, you said we did information, reports and documents.

Evaluate

We will review the number of people we involve and the difference it has made. All organisations will be expected to evaluate this.

For example how have they engaged and if it has worked.

What young people have told us about their participation and engagement

"I like taking part and feeling involved"

"I feel like everyone is included and all young people's views are heard and acted upon"

"I realised how much I benefitted from my early public speaking training today, I have to thank you bundles for that skillset"

"It's really good, it makes everyone feel better when they want to hear your voice"

"I feel honoured to be part of this"

"I feel as if I'm contributing something and making a difference. I also feel as if I've made good friends through this. It improves my teamwork and public speaking and helps me gain the point of view of others"

"I love taking part in this work as I have made lots of new friends and feel like I'm making a difference. It has created so many opportunities for new friendships, and also this event. It has been great to reflect on the impact we have made and reflecting on the skills I have learned"

"Because I represent other young people's voices, it's really fulfilling for me when people actually listen to all the work we're doing"

"We don't get notice nationally. It's not a sprint, it's a marathon really. It takes a lot of effort. It doesn't always feel like we're making a difference unless we have events like these. Then you are near the impact."

"It's all worth it what we're doing for our future, and it's improving things because people are actually taking it on board and listening"

"We share our opinions and everybody is really pleased with what other people have said, which is a really nice feeling"

"I feel very glad that people have decided to listen and have chosen to listen"

"Work like this makes young people feel respected and empowered"

Plan of action

In order to develop and improve the quality of participation and engagement with children, young people and their families in Somerset we will:

- Monitor the levels of children and young people's participation through the **Engagement and Participation team's** Service Plan
- Receive and review reports from individual and collective participation projects to inform the Integrated Care Board (ICB) Children, Young People's and Families Board
- Ensure that the voices of children, young people and their families are heard at events and meetings where practical and requested via our **engagement processes**
- Review and make recommendations for the improvement of participation practice across services; and showcase this in the **Engagement and Participation Annual report** ([link to NEW annual report](#))
- Review this strategy in order to align to future **Somerset Children and Young People's Plans**.



The Participation Toolkit

The Participation Toolkit is a set of tools, guidance and resources that supports workers, staff and volunteers to engage with and involve children and young people and their families.

It aids in the planning, delivery and monitoring of care and support services and most importantly helps adults to head about and learn from the lived experiences of children and young people.

For more information visit the [Participation Toolkit](#)

We've developed an animation that runs through the Participation Toolkit, what participation is, why we do it and how we do it. To view the animation [click here](#) or on the image below.

