BUILDING A CULTURE OF PARTICIPATION: INVOLVING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN POLICY, SERVICE PLANNING, DELIVERY AND EVALUATION.

What does Redcar and Cleveland say about Children And Young Peoples’ Participation?

The Children & Young Peoples’ Strategic Partnership: Investing in Children & Young People, a priority group of Redcar and Cleveland Local Strategic Partnership (Priority Group 3) agreed, in 2003, to promote and coordinate a borough wide approach to the participation of children and young people in service delivery and development.

The partnership has as its purpose

- To work together to make things better for children and their carers;
- To enhance aspirations, life chances and quality of life with and for children and young people in Redcar and Cleveland;
- To recognise partnership members’ huge responsibility to the community to work together with humility and abandon boundaries to ensure children are happy and safe.

The partnership members see the participation of children and young people, either directly or through their carers and those who work with them, as being central to achieving their purpose.

In addition the involvement of children & young people will contribute to the objectives of the Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council Strategic Plan 2003 – 2007:

1: To create a culture of lifelong learning, tackling the barriers to employment, matching the skills and abilities of local people to the needs of modern commerce.

2: To stimulate a thriving economy based on our strengths of manufacturing service, primary industries and tourism as a means of stimulating social and economic growth.

3: To develop and extend the Community Safety Partnership and achieve the identified priorities of the local statutory Community Safety Strategy.

4: To promote a safe environment for business and the community through the encouragement of responsible behaviour, designing out crime and by ensuring that regulatory standards are met.

5: To ensure that all children and young people are able to develop their potential in a safe and secure environment, raising the level of their aspirations, the standard of their educational attainment and providing a base for lifelong learning.
6: To develop the corporate parenting role ensuring that looked after children have the same equalities of opportunity and outcomes as all other children.

7: To provide a built environment that is well designed, effectively planned, healthy, safe and clean by developing and maintaining infrastructures as well as regulating the use and development of land in the community interest.

8: To engage with the Community to promote environmental awareness and sustainability by reducing energy use, safeguarding the use of non-renewable resources, minimising waste arising and striving to provide an environment which is increasingly bio diverse.

9: To promote equality of access to care and support and to protect and promote good health and healthy lifestyles.

10: To protect the vulnerable, promote social inclusion, reduce social inequalities and regenerate disadvantaged neighbourhoods, ensuring equality of access for all to services and opportunities.

11: To ensure access to decent and affordable homes for all and to alleviate homelessness.

12: To strategically plan and manage our resources, communicating and working in partnership with public, private and community/voluntary sectors for the benefit of all people in Redcar and Cleveland.

13: To ensure that services provided are high quality and effective provided by a highly skilled, motivated and competent workforce who operate with due regard to health and safety.
What does the Government say about Children and Young People’s participation?

‘The Government wants children and young people to have more opportunities to get involved in the design, provision and evaluation of policies and services that affect them or which they use’ (Children & Young Peoples’ Unit 2001)

Moreover the Government is setting an example to other organisations by requiring all central government departments to produce action plans detailing how they are to involve children and young people in the decision-making of their department (see http://www.cpyu.gov.uk)

A Children’s Commissioner

The Children’s Act (2004) establishes the position of a Children’s Commissioner. “The Commissioner will act as a children’s champion independent of Government, and will speak for all children, but especially the disadvantaged whose voices are too often drowned out. The Commissioner will advise Government and also engage with others, such as business and the media, whose decisions and actions affect children’s lives.

The Commissioner will develop effective ways to draw on children’s views, locally and nationally, and make sure they are fed into policy making. The Commissioner will test the success of policies in terms of what children think and experience. It is essential that the Commissioner does not become dominated by responding to numerous individual complaints but retains a strategic focus. The role will be to work with the relevant Ombudsman and statutory bodies to ensure children have quick and easy access to complaints procedures that work. The Commissioner will only investigate individual cases where the issues have a wider relevance to other children, as directed by the Secretary of State” (DfES 2003).

To ensure independence, the Commissioner will have the duty to report to Parliament through the Secretary of State for Education and Skills. The Commissioner will report on progress against the outcomes for children, as a result of action by Government and others, drawing on but going wider than the reports arising from joint inspections of children’s services.’

What does the Office for Standards in Education say to schools?

In its handbook for the inspection of primary schools, Ofsted sets out details of the judgements which its inspectors make.

How well are pupils cared for, guided and supported?

Inspectors must evaluate and report on how well a school:

- Ensures pupils care, welfare, health and safety
- Provides support, advice and guidance for pupils based on the monitoring of pupils’ achievement and personal development
• Seeks to involve pupils in its work and development by assessing the extent to which the school seeks values and acts on pupils’ views.

**Judgement criteria for how well pupils are involved in the school’s work and development**

**Excellence (1)** is where the school involves all pupils fully and highly effectively.

- Processes for seeking pupils’ views are highly effective. Pupils express their views thoughtfully and responsibly because they know that even their most challenging ideas are taken seriously. They influence all aspects of school life that affect them directly, from the planning and review of their day-to-day work and play to the appointment of new staff and the way bullying is dealt with.

**Very good (2)**

**Good (3)**

- Pupils know that their views matter. They respond sensibly to regular consultation and staff respect and try to act on what they say. They help to devise school and class rules and are encouraged to think of ways to improve school routines and facilities, such as those for outdoor play. Pupils are involved in setting and reviewing personal targets.

**Satisfactory (4)**

- Pupils are consulted each year about their views. They know they are listened to, and are given reasons if their ideas are not acted on. Most teachers listen to them and welcome their comments and ideas.

**Unsatisfactory (5)**

- Pupils’ views are sought from time to time, but pupils do not perceive them as having much effect. Pupils feel that some teachers respect their views more than others.

**Poor (6)**

- Where most pupils are alienated from school, a very poor (7) judgement is indicated.

- Pupils are rarely asked about changes in school. They feel that the school is run for teachers’ convenience rather than their education and that very few teachers would be interested in what they might have to say about school life.

The guidance for secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral unit is almost exactly the same.
What guidance is there for involving children and young people in policy, service planning delivery and evaluation?

In 2003 the Government sponsored the publication of a handbook, written and researched by the National Children’s Bureau and PK Research Consultancy; “Building a Culture of Participation”.

The handbook aims to:

- Identify and illustrate the benefits of child and youth participation.
- Guide organisations in thinking about how to create appropriate environments in which children and young people can be involved in meaningful ways so that their views are listened to and acted upon.
- Help organisations explore how they can develop cultures and infrastructures which sustain and embed participation throughout all their activity.

What is participation?

The definition of participation used throughout the handbook is that provided by the Children and Young People’s Unit, who published guidance in 2001; “Learning to Listen; Core Principles for the Involvement of Children and Young People”.

- **Where individual decisions are being taken about children’s own lives.** For example, the Children Act 1989 says that looked after children should be involved in decisions about their care package, and statutory guidance is being developed to ensure that children and young people with special educational needs are where possible involved in all decisions relating to their education.

- **Where services for, or used by, children are being developed or provided locally.** For example, many local partnerships and local authorities have discussion groups and special consultation events to influence the design and provision of play facilities, leisure, transport and guidance services.

- **Where national policies and services are being developed or evaluated.** For example, where departments are producing consultation documents and using website design to seek children and young people’s view on policy proposals.
**What did the research say?**

The research that informed the handbook explored:

- Models and levels of participation
- Organisational cultures of participation
- Purpose and benefits of participation
- Building a culture of participation
- Developing positive relationships
- Participation activities
- Outcomes from participation

**What were the main findings from the research?**

- Primarily, undertaking meaningful and sustainable participation requires organisations to change;

- Participation is a multi-layered concept;

- Meaningful participation is a process, not simply the application of isolated participation, activities or events;

- Strategies designed to address both personal and public decision making are needed to fulfil children and young people’s rights, under United Nations Conventions on the Right of the Child (UNCRC), to be involved in all decisions affecting their lives;

- Listening needs to influence change;

- Acting on children and young people’s views has positive outcomes;

- There are different cultures of participation and organisations need to be clear about their reasons for undertaking participation and how they want to develop this.

**Are there any statutory requirements to involve Children & Young People in decision making?**

The Children’s Acts 1975 and 1989 require that a child’s wishes and feelings be ascertained and taken into account when making decisions about them. Similar requirements for participation are written into formal procedures for special educational needs assessment and school evidence (DfES 2001: DfES 1999).
What should we do next in Redcar & Cleveland?

It is recommended that the Borough Council and its partners:-

- Endorse and adopt the values and principles set out in the Social Services Department Children’s Charter.

  As a provider of services to children, young people and their families we will ensure that

  “Children and Young Peoples’ views and wishes will be heard and taken into account in assessment of their needs, provision and evaluation of services”.

  “We will base our services on a partnership between children, young people, their parents and families and the providers of services. We will enable children, young people and families to participate in the decision making process”.

- Adopt the handbook guidance published by DfES in 2003 “Building a Culture of Participation”.

- In addition the Borough Council will:
  
  i) Collect examples of best practice.
  
  ii) Ask departments of the Council to identify training requirements and arrangements for them to involve children and young people in policy, service planning, delivery and coordination.
  
  iii) Through the mechanism of service development planning and monitoring, ensure that particularly vulnerable groups of children and young people are involved in policy, services provision, delivery and evaluation.
  
  iv) Establish a lead role for promoting children’s and young people’s participation within the Borough Council.
  
  vii) Monitor inspection judgements about the participation of children and young people.

Source Materials

“Building a Culture of Participation” (2003) DfES
Redcar & Cleveland Social Services Department “Children’s Charter”
“Youth Charter” Connexions Tees Valley (2002)
“Children’s Bill” 2004