

**CHILDREN & FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, SCRUTINY REVIEW PANEL:
CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION FINAL REPORT**

Report of the Director of Children's Services

1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 As part of the Scrutiny Work Programme approved by the Council for the municipal year 2020/21, the Children & Families Scrutiny Committee decided to conduct a scrutiny review in respect of Children & Young People's Participation and agreed to consider:

- current arrangements for the participation of children and young people;
- opportunities to further develop work with children and young people;
- ways of increasing publicity to involve young people, including those with SEND, in the democratic process, links to elected members and influence decision making.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The Review Panel heard of a number of existing mechanisms that support the participation and engagement of children and young people.

2.2 Stockport has a population of 66,583 aged under 18 and the SEND JSNA (2019) highlights a population of 7,714 aged 0-25 who have Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND). In January 2020 the school age population entitled to Free School Meals (FSM) was 6,192, however since March 2020 this has risen to approximately 7,762. There are also 413 cared for young people in Stockport as at March 2021. Based on Carers Trust data (taken from the last census) it is estimated 1 in 12 pupils could be a young carer - in Stockport it is estimated there could be over 3000 young carers aged 6 – 18 years.

2.3 Participation Opportunities

2.3.1 A number of formal mechanisms exist to support participation and engagement of young people, including but not limited to:

- [Stockport Youth Council \(SYC\)](#): 11-21 year olds (up to 25 for SEND), meets weekly online (since Covid-19 restrictions) and aims to represent the voice of young people in Stockport as well as scrutinise the work of the Council;
- [Children in Care Council \(CiCC\)](#): a statutory group for young people in care from, or living, in Stockport, meets weekly online to discuss ways to improve services, undertake campaigns and social activities;
- [Care Leavers Forum](#): meet to help shape changes to services for care leavers;

- Stockport Safeguarding Partnership: young people's views are sought on child protection processes to shape delivery;
- Stockport Youth Offending Service: Coram Voice provide 15 hours per week of specialised participatory work to inform and shape delivery;
- [Stockport Action Youth Speakers \(SAYS\)](#): 13-25 year olds with SEND, meets fortnightly to feed lived experiences into the design and delivery of services;
- Young Inspectors: a pilot group of young people have been trained to undertake inspections of services from young people's perspectives with the programme expected to commence in the Spring of 2021;
- Autism Ambassadors: a newly established small group of young people with autism have met to explore how they can shape services;
- R Time is a partnership arrangement which focuses on activities to reduce holiday hunger, increase social interaction and create positive behaviour change for young people in the borough;
- Signpost Stockport Young Carers is a registered Charity that works with children and young people from the ages of 6 to 25 years who provide care to another family member who has an illness or disability. Young carers views are sought on a regular basis to help shape the delivery of the service and to raise awareness of their needs across Children and Adult Services.

2.3.2 Appendix 1 provides a more detailed list of participation opportunities for young people as part of the Council's activities and partnership or commissioned arrangements.

2.3.3 Participation activity is supported by 1.6 full time equivalent (fte) Children & Young People's Participation Workers within Stockport Family: 0.6fte specific to Child Protection and 1fte supporting SYC, CiCC, Young Inspectors and Autism Ambassadors as well as GM, NW and National initiatives.

2.3.4 Additional service-specific capacity is provided externally by organisations such as Coram Voice, who support the voice of young people in the Youth Offending Service and Pure Insight who support Care Leavers. The SAYS Group is supported by the parent/carer forum and two part-time participation workers from the Seashell Trust.

2.3.5 There are also a range of young people's activities provided by voluntary and community groups and partnerships (see Appendix 2) which attend to differing needs and demographics across the Borough. A partnership was established in March 2020 to ensure provision is in place for holiday food and activities and this group will provide operational input for delivery of the Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF) 2021. The HAF programme is likely to enable further development of capacity across Stockport to support the participation and engagement of young people in a wider range of activities.

3 REVIEW METHODOLOGY

3.3 There Review Panel agreed that the Scrutiny Review into Children & Young People's Participation would be a single session held in March 2021 with the key individuals invited to attend and present information relation to participation activity. Key individuals included a number of young people from the Stockport Youth Council and Stockport Action Youth Speakers.

3.4 The following individuals attended to provide their insight and experience to the review panel:

- Michelle Bellis, Strategic Participation Leader;
- Steve Davies, Children & Young People's Participation Officer (SYC, CiCC, Autism Ambassadors, Young Inspectors);
- Fiona Berry, Pure Insight (Care Leavers Forum);
- Katy Frankland, Stockport Signpost Young Carers;
- Four young people representing Stockport Youth Council
- Two young people representing Stockport Action Youth Speakers

4 REVIEW PANEL SESSION

4.3 The Review Panel first considered a report of the Director of Children's Services providing information about the participation opportunities and activities, the varying impact of Covid-19 on participation activity and themes of 'what matters' to young people. The information provided is set out in the following sections.

4.4 Impact of Covid-19

4.4.1 Covid-19 has changed the pattern of young people's participation. SYC has successfully recruited additional numbers since meeting virtually, whereas the CiCC has had lower numbers due to some members not wishing to engage online. More recently however additional members have joined.

4.4.2 Whilst there has been a shift in participation during Covid-19, there have been a number of successful initiatives where young people have been engaged on a broader basis. Appendix 3 sets out examples of participation projects undertaken by SYC, CiCC and Young Inspectors.

4.4.3 The SAYS Group has been impacted significantly due to the impact on wellbeing and a reluctance for online engagement during this period. In the early stages of Covid-19, Signpost Young Carers saw a drop in referrals, however, since September 2020, they have increased to normal levels (see Appendix 4 for more details about impact and activities for young carers).

4.5 What Matters to Young People

4.5.1 Participation activities as a matter of course include regular meetings of the groups and involvement in initiatives such as Make Your Mark, International Women's Day, UK Parliament Week as well as Greater Manchester Youth Council and Youth Focus North West.

4.5.2 Over 1,000 children and young people have contributed to shaping the Borough Plan Stockport Youth Council and a wide number of young people across the

Borough have helped to shape the Borough Plan. Issues raised by young people through this process highlight climate change and environmental considerations, job opportunities and homelessness.

- 4.5.3 Make Your Mark (MYM), is a locally co-ordinated national survey to establish the biggest issues facing young people aged 11-18. In 2020 771 young people voted on local topics. This compares with 7,662 young people voting in 2019. The top issues highlighted in 2020 for young people in Stockport were support for mental health services, free university education and climate issues. Homelessness and domestic abuse were also highlighted.
- 4.5.4 The CiCC have been involved in an online arts project as well as work to help shape the offer for children entering care.
- 4.5.5 Young people with SEND also reflected on priorities through the SAYS Group who feel that early help for mental health and emotional wellbeing is the top priority, along with listening and acting upon young people's voices.
- 4.5.6 Following the outcomes of the Joint Local Area Inspection of SEND, the need to improve co-production was identified and young people developed a reference group to inform the work of the SEND Board (see video link). Subsequent work has led to development of a set of I Statements (see Fig 1 below) to inform future work and commissioning for children and families' services.

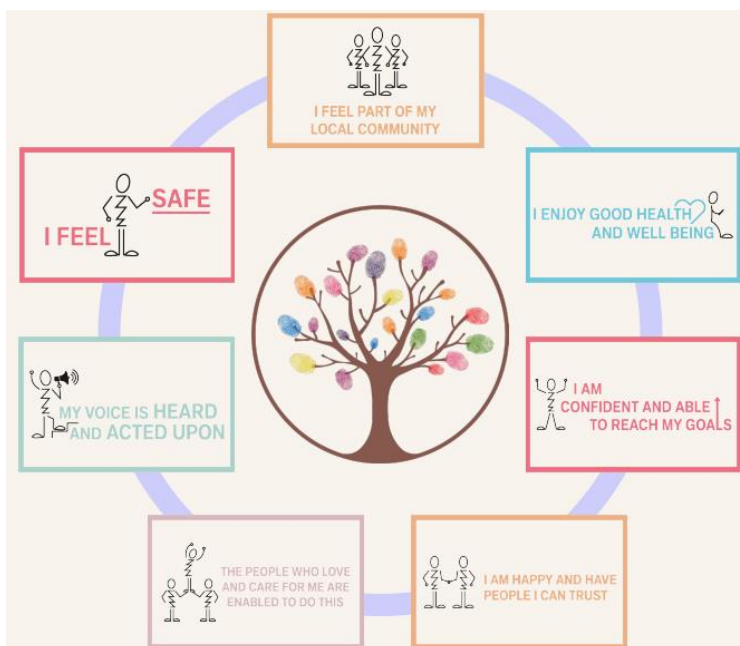


Figure 1: Outcomes Framework

- 4.5.7 Young people strongly influenced the statements through co-design sessions with health and council officers and the statements now form the core of our joint commissioning and contracting arrangements, SEND Strategy, Children's Plan and Early Help Strategy. In addition they provide the clear focus in terms of reference for groups working to support children & families.
- 4.5.8 Young people have also co-designed, with professionals and parent carer representatives, the job descriptions for the Strategic Lead for SEND and a Local Offer Co-ordinator role (see video) as well as being directly involved in interview

processes. Guidance based on the success of these activities is being developed for participation across wider service areas. Students at Aquinas College have also been involved in reviewing the Local Offer website and services to help improve the support available.

- 4.5.9 As part of the DSG review, a survey for children and young people was undertaken in relation to the I Statements set out in the Outcomes Framework. Over 250 pupils responded and whilst the majority feel largely positive about each of the statements, concerns reflected again the need for early help for mental health and emotional wellbeing.

4.6 Discussion

- 4.6.1 Following consideration of the report, each of the invited guests provided the Review Panel with information about their areas of activity. Information presented included:
- 4.6.2 Pure Insight work with approximately 100 care leavers to seek views, matching with peer mentors, parent reference group and support particularly around life skills and wellbeing. and practical barriers and solutions such as the increased importance of digital access, including hardware and data. Where provided, digital access has enabled more young people to engage. Childcare can also be a barrier for young parents, particularly during the pandemic
- 4.6.3 Signpost Young Carers advised of a Scrutiny Review 10 years ago where young people's ideas and thoughts were acted upon in relation to education and work with schools to understand the lived experiences of young carers and support them. Young carers are supported on a number of issues around mental health, education attendance and day to day support. Young carers often feel hidden and not recognised as carers. Young carers keen to be involved with elected members more formally to raise the issues they face.
- 4.6.4 Stockport Youth Council working with Greater Manchester, North West region and nationally through UK Youth Parliament. Youth Council suggested speaking regularly to the Scrutiny Committee to ensure their voices are heard locally by elected members.
- 4.6.5 Children in Care Council advised of initiatives to shape services for cared for children and noted that activities have grown since moving online so currently consideration is being given to future online access being maintained.
- 4.6.6 Autism Ambassadors is a small but growing group initiated by a young person to support other autistic young people and develop across Stockport.
- 4.6.7 Young Inspectors to work with services with emphasis on how organisations offer support to young people with SEND.
- 4.6.8 Young people highlighted the following issues:
- additional support and awareness for mental health is required more now than ever, especially as a result of Covid-19;

- young people need to be encouraged to speak out about mental health issues with work undertaken to remove stereotypes and reduce barriers to access;
- work with the National Trust linked to mental health and disabilities through access to green spaces;
- more green spaces are needed along with consideration of the environment, including litter;
- debit cards for young people, needed particularly since Covid-19 and to enable young people as adults of the future;
- making the town centre more accessible for young people, with better shops;
- public transport improvements are needed to enable young people to connect with activities, support, services and green spaces;
- awareness raising to ensure ease of access to activities;
- housing and benefits for young people with SEND;
- LGBT issues;
- employment opportunities

4.6.9 The discussion emphasised the importance of relationships based on trust and ongoing dialogue. Young people advised that they are keen to establish regular links with elected members to talk about issues and possible solutions on an ongoing basis, suggesting attendance at Scrutiny Committee every six months and by elected members attending groups.

4.6.10 The young people in attendance advised that the Scrutiny Review had provided a great opportunity to speak directly to elected member and they asked to be kept updated with progress on the issues raised through the meeting.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 There are many areas of existing and developing good practice across a number of services which recognise the voice of the child in developing service areas and it would be beneficial to create stronger links across the range of children's services with the formal, democratic processes. It is therefore recommended that the following actions be implemented:

5.1.1 Collate recommendations relating to mental health and emotional wellbeing with the outcomes of the Scrutiny Review Panel for Supporting Young People's Mental/Emotional Wellbeing & Counselling in Schools, ie, to ensure that there is improved awareness raising about services and provisions available for young people; that information includes messages which remove stereotypes and stigma attached to mental health in order to promote active engagement by young people;

5.1.2 Invite young people to attend Children and Families Scrutiny Committee every six months to speak directly to elected members about topical issues and for elected members actively seek to attend young people's groups and hear directly about the work they undertake as messages directly from young people are heard more strongly;

5.1.3 Support active promotion of participation activities for young people, particularly through schools, to engage and have their voices heard through the various groups available;

- 5.1.4 Feedback on the outcomes of the Scrutiny Review to be provided to the young people in attendance by 30th April 2021 to ensure momentum is maintained for working with young people;
- 5.1.5 Explore and promote opportunities for financial awareness training and 'guardian accounts' for young people's debit cards to enable ease of access for public transport;
- 5.1.6 Establish links with work around transport to ensure young people's voices directly influence planning and development, particularly around public transport, cycle networks, buses;
- 5.1.7 Explore access opportunities with the National Trust in support of wellbeing in line with previous undertakings for Stockport residents, and other leisure providers as appropriate.

6 **APPENDICES**

- Appendix 1: Formal Participation Opportunities
- Appendix 2: Stockport Youth Groups
- Appendix 3: Activities Overview for SYC, CiCC, Care Leavers
- Appendix 4: Care Leavers Overview

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS - There are none

Anyone wishing to inspect the above background papers or requiring further information should contact Michelle Bellis on telephone number Tel: 07866 185 866 or alternatively email michelle.bellis@stockport.gov.uk