

Committee:	Date:
Safeguarding Sub Committee	25 September 2015
Subject: Policy overview: engagement and participation of children & young people involved in social care services	Public
Report of: The Director of Community and Children's Services	For Information

Summary

This brief policy overview describes the framework which is being developed and employed within the City of London to enable the meaningful engagement and participation of children and young people involved in social care services. This participation provides an opportunity to learn from people's experience of City of London services, how the services work in practice and to understand and continue to develop their effectiveness – all of which contribute in turn to ensuring positive outcomes for children, young people and their families.

This framework is located within the quality assurance framework of the safeguarding sub-committee of the City of London's Children's Executive Board.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note this report providing an overview on engagement & participation of children and young people's within social care services.

Main Report

Background

1. The principle of children's and young people's participation in the decision-making processes affecting them is now accepted. It is embedded in recent legislation and regulation, including: Human Rights Act (1998); UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989); Children Act (1989 and 2004); Care Planning, Placement & Care Review regulations (2010); and the IRO Handbook (2010).
2. The benefits of participation include the following:
 - Promotion of child protection (failure to listen to children has been a recurring finding of serious case reviews);
 - Upholding children's rights and fulfilling legal responsibilities;
 - Improvement in services and decision-making for children and young people;
 - Engaging children and young people in their care planning process;

- Empowerment of children and young people through increased self-esteem and resilience;
- Enhancement of children's skills for adulthood.

Effective Participation: Aims & Objectives

3. Aims:

- Enable a clear picture of the experience of children, young people and their families who engage with City of London children & family services
- Increase opportunities for children and young people within the City of London to contribute to service design and development;
- Improve professional understanding of children, young people and their families' experience of services.

4. Objectives (to support achievement of the above aims):

- Gather and collate feedback from children, young people and their families about their experience of children & family safeguarding arrangements and child protection services;
- Enhance and complement existing quality assurance and monitoring tools;
- Coordinate consultation exercises – and thus avoid gaps or duplication;
- Provide opportunities to share learning across departments, teams and individual practitioners;
- Use the learning effectively to continue to develop and shape children and family services and professional practice in the City of London.

Current Position

5. At the current time there are several methods used to enable engagement and participation for children and young people involved with social care services in the City:

Children Looked-After and Care Leavers

6. For children and young people looked-after and for care leavers, a range of opportunities are used to gather feedback. Recently these have included:

- a) annual survey 2015;
- b) regular feedback on aspects of the City of London Pledge (within the corporate parenting strategy);
- c) consultation in relation to future career development e.g. work shadowing and work experience.

7. The Children in Care Council (CiCC) began in 2014. The group meets bi-monthly and makes use of opportunities to share and discuss views and opinion on specific agenda items e.g. development of resources to support looked-after children and care leavers. The CiCC is led by an elected CiCC officer and deputy officer, elected from the group and supported by City of London staff.

8. Example: A recent CiCC meeting brought forward the suggestion of using a Facebook group to share information and provide opportunities to raise or discuss

any issues between meetings: this is currently being explored with a view to setting it up in coming weeks. It will then be available for all CiCC members to join in as they choose.

9. Preparation and training is being developed to enable young people's participation in staff recruitment and selection processes. Training and support is also being offered to enable young people to contribute more confidently within larger meetings involving several people and to be able to chair meetings themselves.

'Have Your Say' feedback forms

10. Individual feedback is gathered in relation to each individual's progress e.g. within the Pathway Plan and personal education plans.

Children and young people looked after are able to use 'Have Your Say' feedback forms as they prepare for review of their pathway plan. They are provided in different formats to meet 'age and stage' requirements of children and young people.

Advocacy – London Independent Visitors

11. This befriending scheme is available to children and young people looked after, and care leavers. This project provides volunteer independent visitors who can offer informal support as well as accompanying a young person to a meeting or review to ensure the young person's voice is heard.

Independent Reviewing Officer

12. The role of the independent reviewing officer (IRO) provides another significant route through which children and young people's views are gathered. For example, at a young person's review of their Pathway Plan, the IRO conducts a pre-and midway consultation.

13. In frontline safeguarding, as part of preparation for a child protection conference, the IRO will seek a child/young person's view independently as well as the age-appropriate contribution of the child/young person's views to the social work report.

Annual consultation

14. In June/July 2015 an independent organisation conducted the annual consultation with children/young people engaged with children's services – this yielded 49% response rate. Overall feedback received was positive as well as identifying a number of areas for future development, for example, ensuring that young people are aware of how they can complain and how they can be supported with an advocate if required. (This report can be viewed separately).

Early Help

15. Following initial assessment with a family, the draft is shared with the family and their comments are recorded within the assessment.

16. A quarterly consultation is conducted with up to five families who have received Early Help services during that period. This supports evaluation of the outcomes achieved for each family and further development of the service overall.

Feedback: complaints, comments and suggestions

17. A young person's version of the City of London 'complaints, comments and suggestions' material is available and can be requested through any route including social worker, IRO, foster carer.

Options

18. There are a number of areas identified for continuing development of participation and engagement for children & young people in the City of London:

18.1 Increase access routes to encourage wider participation of children & young people

- a. Development of peer support in engagement;
- b. Revision of feedback forms to ensure they are engaging and accessible;
- c. Translation/interpretation of feedback forms to accommodate culture and language diversity.

18.2 Use an annual forward planner to avoid duplication and/or gaps in areas for engagement and consultation – and to ensure a cumulative picture is gathered of the presenting situation.

18.3 Continue to develop a shared access point for consultation and engagement results which can be used by different teams.

18.4 Continue to develop the information and resources available for children, young people and their parents and carers in accessible and engaging formats.

18.5 Extend and develop resources and materials available for staff to enable creative engagement with children, young people and their families.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

19. These suggestions reflect the City's Children and Young People's Plan 2015-18 which states its commitment to '*ensure the voice of the child and young person informs all that we do.*'

20. This in turn reflects one of the key principles within the central government revised document '[Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015](#)' which states:

"Effective safeguarding arrangements in every local area should be underpinned by....a child-centred approach: for services to be effective they should be based on a clear understanding of the needs and views of children." (Key principles, p8/9)

Conclusion

21. The ongoing development of effective engagement and participation of children and young people in the City of London, to understand their needs and how they best can be met, will enable City of London's children and family services to ensure their practice reflects and meets those needs effectively, and that it continues to encourage and enable positive outcomes for the children and young people they support.

22. The safeguarding sub-committee will continue to be updated on outcomes from participation exercises and activities. For example, this will include the annual consultation and activities within the Children in Care Council.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – City of London Social Work Practice Standards – Children & Families

Appendix 2 – Children & Young People's Involvement in Review Meetings

(hard copies will be available at the meeting, or can be provided upon request)

Rose de Paeztron

Participation Consultant, Children & Families' Team, DCCS

T: 0207 332 3621

E: rose.depaeztron@cityoflondon.gov.uk