



# One minute guide

## Voice and Influence

No. 64, April 2024

### What does having a voice and influence mean?

Children, young people and their parents and carers have a right to be involved in decisions that affect their lives. Having a voice and influence means they feel that their voices are listened to, valued and can influence decisions and actions.

We use the term 'voice and influence' as children and young people have told us they want one definition, because there are so many different terms e.g. participation; empowerment; and active engagement, that it can be confusing.

### Why are we doing it?

Leeds has a bold ambition to be the best city for children and young people – a child friendly city. At the heart of making this a reality is a commitment to working restoratively *with* children and young people so that their voices are at the heart of decisions that affect them.

There is strong evidence that working with children and young people wherever possible, instead of doing things *to* them or *for* them produces better outcomes and helps to build confidence and resilience.

Listening consistently to the voices of children, young people and families is central to the culture Leeds is working to create and this is evident in:

- Leeds' children and young people's [12 wishes](#) for what makes a child friendly city. Wish 11 is that... 'Children and young people can express their views; feel heard and are actively involved in decisions that affect their lives';
- The city's [Children and Young People's Plan](#). One of the five outcomes in the Plan is that... 'All children and young people are active citizens who feel they have voice & influence'; and
- Article 12 of the [UN convention](#) on the rights of the child, which states that 'every child and young person has the right to express their views freely – about every thing that affects them'.

Giving a voice and influence to children and young people in decision making demonstrates our commitment to them and acknowledges their right to shape their own future. It increases trust and can enable positive change even in complex situations.

Practitioners can feel confident that decisions are informed by what children, young people and families say they want and need, which should lead to better quality services, saving money and using resources more effectively.

## How can we give a voice and influence to children, young people and their families?

Working restoratively to listen and respond to the voices of children and young people is fundamental to front line-work that takes place every day across the city. Children and young people's voices should be considered at all levels:

At an **individual level**: they are involved in making choices and influencing decisions about their own lives, for example co-producing their education, health and care plan or a child working with their teacher to agree their learning targets;

At a **family level**: all members of the family are involved in sharing their views, making choices and influencing decisions that affect their family. For example a range of family members would be directly involved in developing an action plan at a Family Group Conference;

At a **service level**: they are involved in shaping and influencing how services they use are planned, delivered and evaluated. Feedback is sought in a range of ways and routinely informs service improvement, for example by involving them in developing communication materials and consulting them on the type of activities provided

At a **strategic level**, they influence local or city wide priorities and agendas, for example in staff recruitment panels for senior leaders or representing their peers on a city wide or local forum where they make recommendations or advise decision makers.

## What help is available?

When planning a specific piece of work to get the views of children, young people and their parents and carers, it is important to be clear from the start what the purpose and outcomes of the work are and to feedback afterwards to those who have taken part about how you acted on their views. It is also important to check from the outset that there are not existing consultations that would provide you with the same information. The Voice and Influence (VIC) Team can help with this.

The team also has a network of over 1200 voice and influence 'leads' in a wide range of settings e.g. youth groups, third sector, health, schools etc. across the city who receive updates via email and newsletters. The team work in partnership with and can introduce services to a range of youth voice groups who specifically work with young people who are seldom heard for example young people who are LGBT, looked after, SEND, young carers, refugee and asylum seekers etc.

The team can help other teams and services to work in partnership with children and young people from their programmes and projects including: Children in Care Council, Care Leavers Council, Leeds SEND Youth Council, Leeds Youth Council, Leeds Children's Mayor and Leeds Members of Youth Parliament.

## Key contacts and for more information

You can contact the Voice Influence Change Team at [VIC@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:VIC@leeds.gov.uk) and also information about how we promote the voice and influence of parent's carers and families is available [here](#)

Information for young people about city wide voice and influence opportunities is available on [Breeze – Have your say](#).

For more info follow Leeds Youth Voice on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#).