



One minute guide

Voice and Influence Opportunities

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What are voice and influence opportunities?

Having a voice and influence means children, young people and families are supported to have their voices heard, enabling them to have an influence over decisions and actions that affect them. There is more information about its importance in the [Voice and Influence guide](#).

Children, young people and their parents and carers should feel they can express their views and have their voices heard in all aspects of their lives including their home, schools, services they use, places of work, local communities and their city.

How can services find out about and share voice and influence opportunities?

A network of over 1600 Voice Influence and Change 'link staff' (including a link in all schools) operates across settings and organisations throughout the city. Members of the network can share and promote Voice and Influence news, consultations, events and training and new groups via the Voice Influence and Change team E-bulletins and the team will promote opportunities via Leeds Youth Voice social media platforms ([Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#)). The team also have a Leeds Youth Council network of 500+ young people aged 11 – 18 (up to 25 with additional needs) who receive monthly opportunity updates via email and text. Services who want to meet or consult directly with young people can contact the team who may be able to facilitate them meeting with Leeds Youth Voice groups or link them up with youth groups in the city.

Children, young people, parents, carers and families who have contact with Children's Services

Across the directorate we are committed to working *with* children, young people, parents and carers on issues and decisions that they feel are important and affect their lives. In the [Children and Young People's Plan](#) it is one of the five key outcomes that children and young people feel they have a voice and influence and are active citizens. It is the responsibility of all staff and a core behaviour to ensure we are listening and responding to the views of children. Children and young people have also told us how important it is that they can express their views and feel heard, as expressed in the [Child Friendly Leeds wishes](#). These are developed directly from children and young people's feedback, and will be updated every three years.

Staff working with individual children and families must ensure their thoughts, wishes and feelings are heard and influence decisions taken in meetings, reviews and plans and that they are kept up-to-date and receive feedback. Staff are also encouraged to ensure meetings are child and family centred, for example Family Group Conferences.

In handling sensitive, complex or safeguarding issues there may be times when an adult advocate for the child or young person is able to support them to share their views. In Leeds, we commission an [advocacy service](#) to enable children and young people to have the opportunity to access this support. Practitioners have access to training and resources to strengthen their knowledge and skills in building relationships and using creative approaches to seek the views of children and young people.

When children, young people, parents and carers feel their voices have not been heard or they have had a really positive experience they can contact the [customer relations team](#) for further advice and support.

Voice and influence opportunities for parents, carers and families

Children's centres: Parents and carers can get actively involved in their local children's centre; for example, many have an active parents' forum or children's centre advisory board.

Schools/ colleges: Parents and carers can apply to become parent governors, take part in school consultations and some schools have active parent forums or parent councils.

Community: Local organisations and groups may provide opportunities for parents and carers to have their say via consultations or get involved in developing community projects. Parents and carers can also attend community committee meetings to share their views.

Citywide: Parents and carers can sign up to be part of the Leeds citizens panel and share what they think about services the council provide and issues affecting whether they live. There are also citywide parent/ carer forums for example for foster carers and for families with children with SEND which are either run by parent volunteers or are facilitated by services.

Voice and influence opportunities for children and young people

Schools/ Colleges: Children and young people wanting to get more involved in decision making in their school/ college should speak to the member of staff responsible for the school council or student leadership to find out about different opportunities available.

Community: Local groups may also provide different voice and influence opportunities for young people in the local area or who are accessing their services e.g. youth groups, young people led projects and campaigns, social action projects, interview panels for staff and consultations. The communities team work with community committees to develop opportunities for 8-19 year olds to take part in to helping to decide how local funding is spend on youth activities.

Citywide: [UK Youth Parliament](#) and Leeds Youth Council provide opportunities for young people aged 11-19 (up to 25 with additional needs) to have their voices heard on city-wide issues, work with decision makers and campaign on issues that are important to young people. Annual elections take place for a child in year 5 to become Leeds Children's Mayor and work on their manifesto aims for a year.

Issue based /targeted Voice and Influence Opportunities

For young people interested in sharing their views and running campaigns or projects on a specific issue, for example health or the arts, there are a range of forums and groups that young people can find out about. There are also voice and influence groups and forums set up by organisations supporting different communities such as LGBTQ, young carers, refugees and asylum seekers and young people involved in youth justice. The VIC team can advise on local opportunities and groups.

Care experienced young people can also join the Care Leavers Council or Have a Voice Council and work with decision-makers to improve children's social care services. A range of other opportunities also exist for care experienced young people to participate in decision making processes ,e.g. leading on planning events, participating in recruitment panels and commissioning services, and training foster carers and social care staff.

Who are the key contacts?

For more information you can contact the Voice Influence Change Team at VIC@leeds.gov.uk or visit the team website www.leeds.gov.uk/youthvoice and find them on @leedsyouthvoice on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#)

Also, you can visit the Parent, Carer and Family Voice and Influence website [here](#).