

# Our Nottinghamshire Approach to Participation



## Annual report

April 2023 - March 2024



Nottinghamshire  
County Council

# Foreword

In line with our strengths-based approach and core values of building strong relationships, listening and learning, and treating people with fairness and respect we want everyone to have the opportunity to participate in decisions which affect their lives. We promote the participation of all children, young people and their families.

There are already lots of examples of good participation activities taking place and opportunities for children, young people, parents and carers to be involved. We want to make sure, however, that we are learning from and enabling everyone to be involved effectively and on a more consistent basis.

To help achieve this, our **Children and Families Participation Network** was set up in spring 2023. The network provides a space for people working with children and families to learn, support and challenge each other, share ideas, and celebrate achievements.

The participation leads across the network champion everybody's right to be heard. They are helping make sure that people's voices are listened to, heard, and have influence over the ongoing design, development, and review of support and services to achieve shared outcomes. They are promoting the importance of sharing the impact of this and the difference it is making to the experiences and outcomes for children, young people and their families.

The approach we are taking to support our participation activity is described in: **Our Nottinghamshire Approach to Participation with children, young people and families**. This is a revised and renewed version of the Nottinghamshire Children, Young People and Families Participation Strategy. The hope is that information about our approach to participation with children, young people and families is more accessible for everyone to read, understand and get involved with.

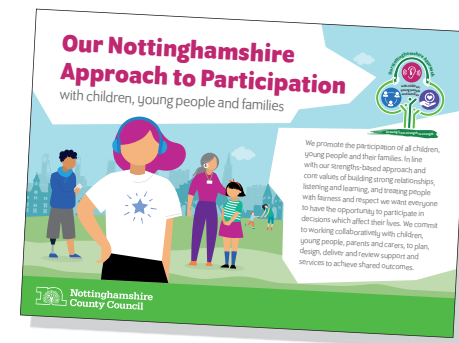
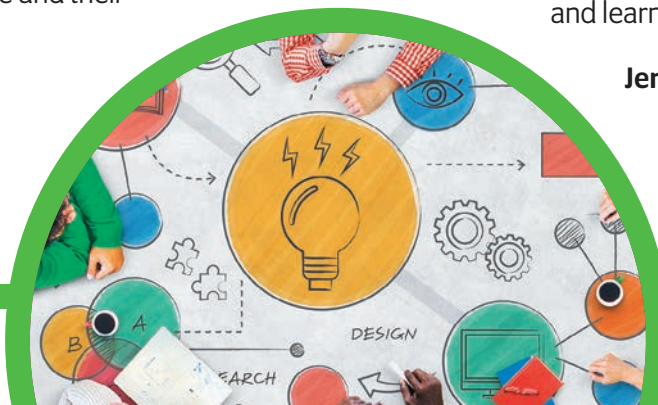
We also launched our new **'Participation: voice, influence and change' web pages** in spring 2024 to provide more information about participation, how we do it, how people get involved and examples of the difference it is making. Scan the QR code to find out more.

[Participation: voice, influence and change | Nottinghamshire County Council](#)






This annual report provides a more detailed overview of the participation activity taking place with children, young people, parents and carers across Nottinghamshire, the positive impact it has had this year, and our aspirations for the future as we strive to fully embrace and embed a culture of listening and learning.

**Jenny Smith, Strengths-Based Practice Lead,  
in collaboration with the Children and Families  
Participation Network**



# Supporting participation in different ways

People can participate in lots of different ways and engagement can have different focuses. We are committed to involving children, young people, parents and carers in all areas as described in the image below, taken from Our Nottinghamshire Approach to Participation with children, young people and families:

 <h2>Individual</h2>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Participation activity</b> relates directly to the person's own life</li> <li>● <b>Outcomes</b> that primarily impact the individual.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Involving people in their plan</li> <li>● Peer support and mentoring.</li> </ul>
 <h2>Services for children, young people and families</h2>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Participation activity</b> aims to improve the quality of the service</li> <li>● <b>Outcomes</b> affect a wider group of children, young people, parents, carers and families.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Recruiting and interviewing staff</li> <li>● Telling us about your experience of support and services.</li> </ul>
 <h2>The Council</h2>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Participation activity</b> relates to planning, design, delivery and review of support and services</li> <li>● <b>Outcomes</b> influence policy, practice and changes in your local area.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Deciding how money should be spent</li> <li>● Being on forums or boards that lead to change.</li> </ul>

We recognise that children, young people, parents, and carers know their own lives and journeys better than anybody else. We also know that when they share their ideas, views and the things which are important to them, these should be valued and have influence on the support and service they receive as individuals.

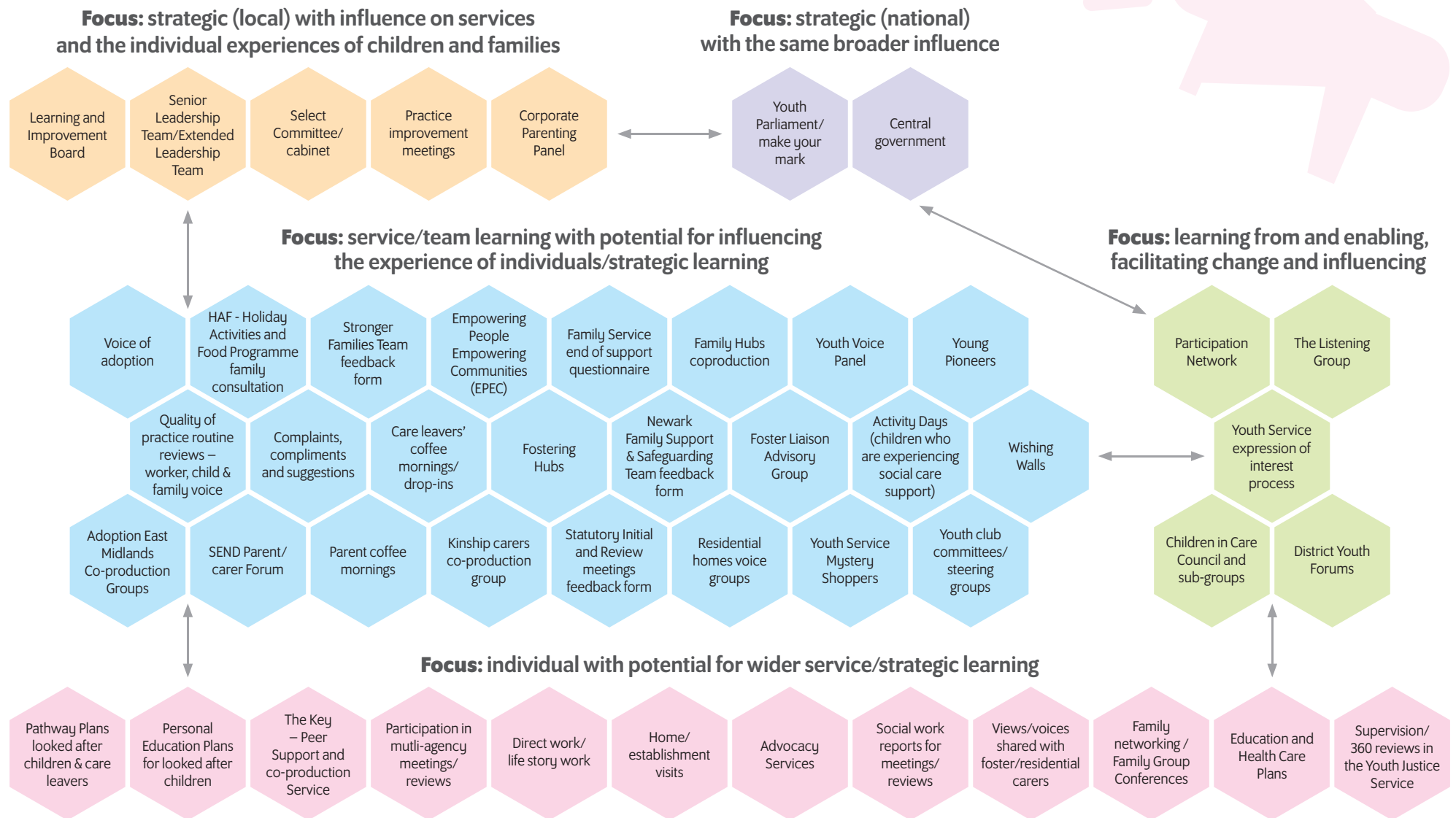
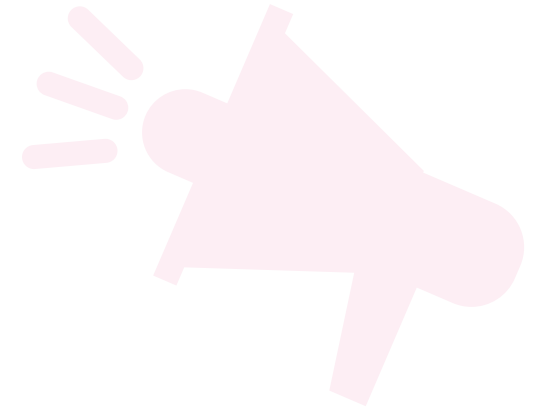
As we listen to people's experiences, we might notice that others are sharing similar views and ideas. Our aspiration is that we get better at making sure that these are listened to, heard and that people have a strong collective voice when there are opportunities for improvements to how services are run and the way in which support is offered.

We want families to get the right support, at the right time and for Nottinghamshire to be the best place for children and young people to grow up. We therefore need to make sure that people's voices have influence over how services are designed, developed, and reviewed.

We have begun to draw a map (pictured on page four) of some of the different spaces and ways in which we listen to the voices of children and young people who need help, protection and care. The map includes the opportunities we also have to hear the views of their parents, carers, friends and other people who are important to them.

The arrows demonstrate that whilst the focus of the voice activity might be about someone's individual plan, for a specific team or service, or to try and influence the wider department or Council, the learning could have a greater impact across the system and on the experiences and outcomes of more children, young people and families across Nottinghamshire.

# Voice, influence and change activity map



# Learning through participation: voice, influence and change

We know that in some areas, the views and ideas of children, young people, parents, and carers are already at the centre of decision making and have a strong influence on how services are run.

We also know that in other areas, we need to do more to make sure that people feel that their voices are heard, that they matter, and can have a positive impact on their lives and the experience of others too.

We want to celebrate some of the ways in which participation activities have made a difference over the past year before sharing our aspirations for the year to come.

The different activities included in the voice, influence and change map are described further in the next section and/or in appendix 1.



# Examples of how participation activities have made a difference this year

## Activity Day for children who have experience of Child Protection Planning

To support people who have experience of child protection planning to have a strong voice in helping improve the help and support we provide, the Strengths-based Team and social care staff organised an activity day in November 2023 at MyPlace Young People's Centre, Mansfield.

29 children aged 5-15 years from 17 families took part in a range of activities including bonfire biscuit decorating, making dream catchers, lavender bags, friendship bracelets, and playing games. Children were able to share their views about their experiences of having a social worker, and about their plans.

### What difference did the activity day make?

The children and young people:

- Had fun and gained confidence
- Took pride in what they made and valued being able to take something home to share
- Valued having time and something for themselves

- Built trust with their workers
- Realised that other children have social workers
- Had the opportunity to be listened to and give their views.



It was great to spend more time with boys. It helped me to see a side of both of them that I have not seen before. Their likes and dislikes, their mannerisms, their interactions as siblings and how interacted with other children and adults. They were an absolute pleasure!

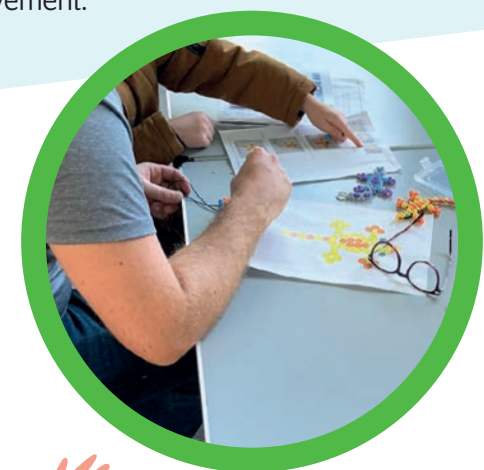
**Worker**





## Next steps

- We have activity days taking place in Newark in April and Rushcliffe and Broxtowe in May 2024, and are looking to have more events throughout the year involving children and young people of all ages.
- We will continue to ask all families about their views throughout the time they are experiencing social care involvement.



### The parents and carers:

- Enjoyed being shown the things children had made
- Valued how the workers shared how much they enjoyed seeing the children's personalities shine out, and about their achievements
- Appreciated that the activity day had been offered, felt that it had strengthened relationships with their worker, as well as building confidence and resilience for their children
- Valued the opportunity to give feedback on their experiences
- Shared they would like more events like this for their children
- Were invited to a follow up coffee morning to help provide another space for listening and learning to family's experiences.

### The children's workers:

- Valued the opportunity to spend extended time with the children
- Learnt about interactions between siblings and with other children
- Enjoyed seeing the children making choices and being creative
- Felt the day provided a safe space for children and young people to talk if they were worried about anything
- Enjoyed conversations with parents about the day
- All felt it had positively impacted on their relationships with the children they spent the day with.



“ I think it has had a positive impact on the child's ability to share their voice and feel confident when doing this. ”  
**Worker**

# Ashfield Parent Coffee Morning

Following the successful activity day for children with experience of child protection planning, we contacted their parents/ carers for feedback on the day and offered the chance to meet others whose children attended.

A cluster of parents and grandparents who all lived in the Ashfield area were keen to do this, so a coffee morning was arranged for 12th December 2023, at the Summit Centre in Kirkby-in-Ashfield. This venue had been suggested by two parents and was within walking distance and accessible for all.

On the day three parents came, one bringing her two-year-old daughter. A grandmother was unable to attend as her child was poorly.

## What difference did the coffee morning make?

- Parents shared positive feedback about the activity day, and would like it for older children and more similar events in the future
- The group quickly established a safe space (this may have been because of having in common their children attending the activity, which was a positive way to start the session)
- Listening to each other, demonstrating empathy and compassion
- Empowering as they praised each other's successes, for example a parent completing her parenting course

- Able to share similar experiences, including about parenting teenage boys, mental health, domestic abuse and challenges of getting children assessed in school
- Power of experiencing the same things
- Seeing positives of two-year-old in this setting, with positive comments from parents and facilitators giving mum confidence.

## Next steps

- The group said they wanted to meet again, so a follow up coffee morning was offered in January
- On this occasion no one came, and in follow up conversations with the parents it emerged that family crises had affected attendance
- We recognised that for parents who are still working with social care, life is often challenging and unpredictable
- The one-off follow-up coffee morning to the activity day worked well, and we are offering a similar event in Newark in May 2024
- The need for a parent forum is apparent, however our learning is perhaps that this needs to be once the plan and involvement has ended
- We are setting up coffee mornings for parents and carers who have had past personal experience with Social Care Services so that we can hear their views starting in Gedling on Wednesday 15 May and Bassetlaw on Tuesday 2 July.





# Participation with young people who are looked after

## Janie\*

Janie, a 16-year-old with significant emotional and mental health needs, co-produced an image-based pathway plan with her social worker, Clare. To support Janie in the best way, Clare needed to take a creative and strengths-based approach.

### How was the Pathway Plan created?

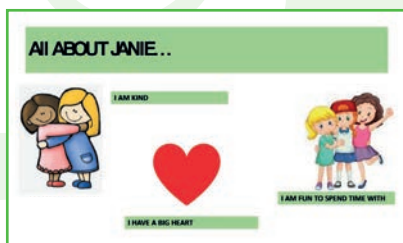
Janie and Clare used a PowerPoint format with photographs and illustrations, linking it to Janie's placement plan. They celebrated Janie's achievements and identified her goals, ensuring both her version and the standard document were completed.

### What difference did it make?

Co-creating the plan increased Janie's self-esteem, making her feel included and capable. She now understands the plan's importance for her present and future.

## Next steps

Clare and Janie will regularly update her pathway plan with new photos and illustrations as she progresses towards achieving her goals.



\*Names changed for anonymity.

## Leon\*

Leon, a 14-year-old child who lives with a foster family, is usually quite shy, and often frustrated due to difficulty expressing his feelings. His Independent Review Officer, Kate, has been instrumental in helping him understand and actively participate in his Looked After Child Review.

### How has Leon participated in his Review?

Kate has helped Leon build trust and express his views more effectively. Leon decided to attend part of his review meeting and expressed his desire to attend a mainstream school.

### What difference has this made to Leon?

Leon's active participation has led to a clearer understanding of his needs among his support network. He now attends a mainstream school and feels more confident in expressing his views.

## Next steps

Leon's progress has been recognised and appreciated by his support network. Kate will continue to prepare Leon for future Review meetings, and his support network will continue to work with him to plan for his future.

Clare and Kate will also share what they learnt through supporting Janie and Leon in these ways with their teams to extend the reach of the positive impact to other children and young people.

# Participation with care leavers/care experienced young people

## Online survey for young adults 21+

Care leavers who are moving to be supported through the 21+ Team are provided with an online form they can complete anonymously. They are invited to answer nine questions, including about their experience of having support from Personal Advisors and Leaving Care.

### What difference did the coffee morning make?

Feedback gathered from young people:

*“Had two, first was rubbish second is sound. Just good to have someone in my corner I try to sort stuff for myself but know that she is here if I need backup. Took me to my job interview and waited outside for me asked me all about it when I got out and was so chuffed with me and when I got the job at Halfords she celebrated with me brought me a cake and a card just what I needed there have been loads of times but this was most recent thing I can think about it was really nice I’ll never forget it I felt proud for the first time ever. I’ll stay there in that job forever now she made sure I got plenty of wages left just need to remember to pay service charges which I’m good at now”.*

*“Leaving care have been very helpful guiding me through hard times and pointing me in the right direction. I really valued all the support I received it has impacted my life positively I have no complaints”.*

*“There is nothing to tell as they was that good”.*

*“She has been great to me :) very helpful and a lot of help and she has been there for me when I need help and she has been the greatest :)”.*

### Next steps

- Responses are regularly reviewed to assess changes that could be made to the support provided or to the local offer to increase support to care leavers based on what they are saying about their experience.
- The survey will be ongoing. We will be looking at ways to increase take up of the survey to get more responses from care leavers.



## Other activities which have taken place over the last few years with funding from the Nottinghamshire Holiday Activities and Food programme



Activities included:

- Quad biking
- Virtual Reality gaming
- Archery
- Music festival
- Bowling
- Tickets to pantomime
- Axe throwing
- Access to Winter Fest



### What has the impact been for children and young people?

The activities have enabled looked after children and care leavers to do things they may have not experienced before and allowed them to meet other care leavers. They have provided them with something that is enjoyable and special, helping them to feel they are valued and cared for. A key factor in people feeling able to take part was often whether they could attend with a friend or with their personal advisor.

### Next steps

At this time we are not able to bid for further funds via the Nottinghamshire Holiday Activities and Food programme due to changes in their eligibility conditions.



## The Local Offer

The local offer has recently been updated with distinct sections to focus on different areas such as care leavers who are young parents. We asked Personal Advisors supporting young people who are parents if they would be willing to help review the draft version of the activity which is offered locally.

### What difference did this make?

The responses helped shape the local offer.

They liked things such as:

- Support to help meet other parents, both other care leavers and non-care leavers
- Someone to talk to when deciding what to do about pregnancy. A young person didn't get on with her social worker so when deciding what to do, she had her mum. If someone doesn't have family, then it has different options of people to speak with and it does not assume the main worker is the most important person.

They also identified areas they felt could be improved:

- Lack of Supported Accommodation Provider (SAP) options for young parents
- Consider making the offer into an easy read/shortened version.

Find out more:

[Nottshelpyourself | Local Offer for Care Leavers](#)

### Next steps

The views have been taken into consideration in the development process of the local offer and the final versions are being produced.





## Support through the Refugee Forum

People from the Refugee Forum came into a social care office to discuss asylum applications/processes with various cultural groups.

### What was the impact for young people?

Young people got clear information and there was helpful myth busting. Social workers were not present during the sessions, and they were able to raise questions, such as about being looked after.

### Next steps

There were significant changes proposed by the Illegal Immigration Act 2023 so we are hoping to invite the Refugee Forum back to do some sessions with young people who might be more directly impacted by this legislation.



## Participation in the Youth Justice Service

### What is Youth Voice in the Youth Justice Service?

Youth Voice is a group of young people who meet regularly to share their experiences with the Youth Justice Service. The Service is working to improve by listening to their voices.

The group recently discussed the 'journey of the child' in the Youth Justice Service. They've shared ideas on how to make this better for young people.

### What difference has Youth Voice made?

Youth Voice has made a big difference. Their feedback has led to changes in how the Service works, for example giving all children a copy of their plan and explaining things more clearly. The young people in the group have also grown more confident and made new friends.

### Next steps

The Youth Justice Service will continue to listen to young people's voices through Youth Voice. They'll also help other services, like the police, to understand and improve the experiences of young people.



## Youth Voice activity championed by the Nottinghamshire Youth Service

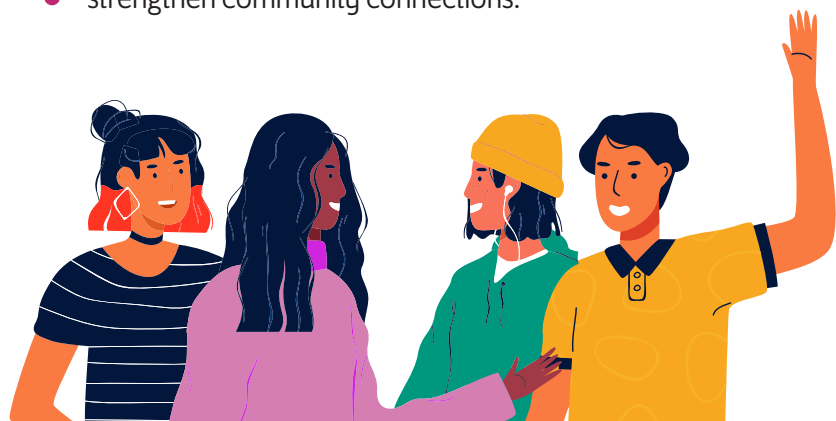
Youth Voice is a corner stone of Nottinghamshire County Council's Youth Service which has a robust participation structure to enable young people to be heard and invoke change at a local and national level. Youth Voice is about enabling young people to channel views and opinions in a way that will get them heard. Young people are supported to learn how to debate, articulate their opinions appropriately, and have an awareness of their rights and responsibilities; equipping them with the skills to achieve their goals whatever they might be.

A snapshot of how the Youth Service's Participation team facilitates this work:

### Consultation

Young people have broad interests and concerns and have opinions on all issues that affect their community, not just youth issues. Consulting with young people about a range of relevant issues helps us to:

- understand new and unique perspectives (lived experiences)
- make better, more informed decisions
- provide more suitable services and events
- strengthen community connections.



### What difference has consultation made this year?

In 2022 the youth service started working with young people to seek their views on applying for funding to build a new youth and community centre in Mansfield. Young people worked with youth workers and officers to create a promotional video as part of a funding application. Young people expressed what they wanted in a youth centre, how they would use the space and where it should be. Sessions took place involving young people in designing the building to ensure that the architects were fully aware of how they would like a centre to look. Young people were able to express their opinions through accessing and visiting existing young people's centres. In January 2024 young people involved in the funding application attended a visit by the Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, where it was announced that funding for the youth and community centre had been approved.

### Next steps

We will continue to work with groups of young people and other partners to ensure that the space truly meets the needs of local people.





## Co-production

Co-production is a meeting of minds coming together to find shared solutions. It involves people who use services being consulted, included, and working together from the start to the end of any project that affects them. It works best when young people who use services, their families and carers are valued by organisations as equal partners, can share power, and have influence over decisions made.

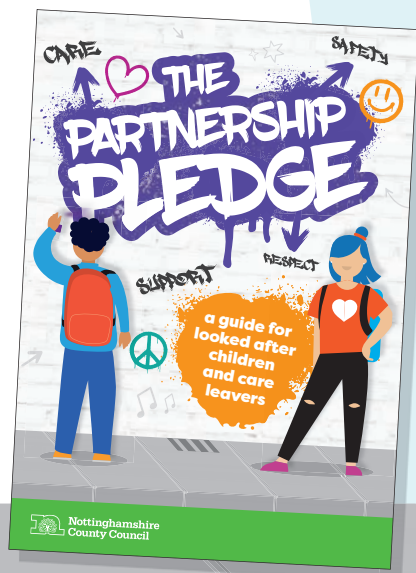
### What has been the impact of co-production activity between the Youth Service and young people this year?

An example was the development and design of the Partnership Pledge. Through various Children in Care Council and wider engagement sessions across Nottinghamshire, young people were actively engaged in designing and creating the new partnership pledge. Consultation took place with various partners to ensure the services were heard, included and up to date for young people. Young people designed the pledge in a way that would engage and involve all children, young people and care leavers. It was produced in a paper-based, online and an animated version including artwork, quotes, young people's experiences, thoughts and feelings.

[the-partnership-pledge-2023.pdf](#)  
([nottinghamshire.gov.uk](http://nottinghamshire.gov.uk))

### Next steps

The pledge will be reviewed and is underpinned by the looked after child and care leavers strategy.



## Expression of Interest

The Young People's Voice expression of interest (Eoi) is a mechanism which enables services both internal and external to the Council to engage with young people and hear their views about the provision they receive, or are affected by, and provides an opportunity for young people to offer insight into how changes can be made to better meet their needs or make improvements to services.

The Eoi process provides an opportunity for co-production, participation, and engagement, and offers an effective way to ensure young people's views are heard and incorporated into service design and delivery. Each Eoi submitted is reviewed by the Young People's Board allowing them to take ownership of the agenda, establish the information required and the time needed to enable their active involvement, they then determine the next steps of engagement. The expression of interest forms can be accessed here:

- [Eoi Young People engagement](#)
- [Eoi Young People involved in interviews.](#)



### What has been the impact of the expression of interest process?

Some of the previous expression of interests have had a long-lasting positive impact. In 2023 and 2024 members of the Children in Care Council delivered activities/workshops to educate students from a care experienced perspective using poems, film and artwork produced by care experienced young people.

The workshop covered:

- Why do we have a Children in Care Council?
- Statutory obligations of a local authority
- Why language matters
- What does care mean to a young person?
- Design the ideal/perfect social worker



The sessions concluded with a question-and-answer session. Fantastic feedback was received, and it is now part of the annual calendar of activities for the Children in Care Council. The input of the young people will continue to have a powerful impact and play a key part in the learning and development of student social workers.

A consultation session also took place in October 2023 with the University of Nottingham on the families and children's module. Members of the Children in Care Council gave feedback on what needs to be taught from the view of a child, highlighting areas that they considered to be missing including understanding teenagers, jargon and the power of language. The module has been updated to reflect the invaluable contributions of the young people.

## Interviews, visits and inspections

Through the expression of interest process young people are asked to take part in mystery shopper inspections, critical friend reviews of services or to sit on interview panels. If the EoI is approved, youth workers will then develop training packages to support this work. Opportunities for young people to attend workshops are then provided before commencing this work.

In the last year young people have been involved in interviews for:

- Adoption East Midlands - two posts
- Youth Service Rushcliffe District Youth Work Senior Practitioner
- Commissioned Projects and Voluntary sector Development team Senior Practitioner
- Bilsthorpe Youth Worker
- Newstead Youth Worker
- Hawtonville Youth Worker
- C-Card Worker
- Strengths-based Practice Team Senior Practitioners - three posts.



The young people's contributions in the recruitment process for these colleagues has been invaluable. Our aspiration is for more children, young people, parents and carers to be involved in recruitment and we are developing further guidance on this to support teams.

## Members of UK Youth Parliament (MYP)

The UK Youth Parliament is supported by funding from the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. Young people aged 11-18 are elected by young people to represent Nottinghamshire for two years. The role involves listening to marginalised groups, organising events, making films, meeting MPs and local councillors, lobbying for change, organising campaigns, appearing in the media, all to amplify the views of their peers.

As a member of Youth Parliament, they will take part in several events. This ends with priority issues being debated by members from across the country when they take over the House of Commons for a day. Current campaign priorities are Mental Health, Votes at 16, Climate Change and End Poverty. In November 2023 the election process for UK Youth Parliament 2024-2026 commenced. Potential candidates were invited to apply and submit their manifestos with the support of the participation team. The election took place in February 2024 with 25 candidates standing for election across the 7 Districts with voting taking place in schools, colleges, young people's centres and mobile youth centres. 13,970 votes were cast.



## Make your Mark

Make Your Mark gives all young people aged 11-18 in the UK the chance to have a say on the biggest issues facing young people. Supported by over 780 schools, colleges, youth groups, and Councils it informs the debates our members of youth Parliament hold in the House of Commons. It also shapes local campaigns across Nottinghamshire. In 2024 over 12,000 young people in Nottinghamshire responded to Make your Mark.

## Young People's Board (YPB)

The Young People's Board meets six times a year in Nottinghamshire County Councils chambers. It is made up of the Members of Youth Parliament, representatives from the Children in Care Council, Voices of Adoption, District & Borough youth forum chairs and vice chairs, Pioneers chair and vice chair. The agenda is set by young people with senior officers and elected members invited to attend. They will evaluate expressions of interests. These can be presented in person if invited by the Board. Campaign work is shared and discussed and where debates on proposed work / issues takes place. They have recently updated their landing page on the Council website to raise their profile and promote the work they do: [Youth voice and youth parliament | Nottinghamshire County Council](#)

## District & Borough Youth Forums, & Pioneers (Youth Forum for young people with a disability)

District & Borough Youth Forums support Members of Youth Parliament in representing the views of the young people they represent. The District Youth Forums and the Pioneers Youth Forum enable the Members of Youth Parliament to support the local and specific needs of groups and individuals in their area whilst feeding back on national campaigns and issues. Localised and specific expression of interests will be presented at these meetings. There will be a minimum of six meetings a year. Forums will arrange additional meetings to move forward specific projects. Young people between the ages of 10-19 can attend the District & Borough Youth Forums and up to the age of 24 for Pioneers.

### What impact have Youth Forums made this year?

An example of the work undertaken by Broxtowe Youth Forum was around the environment and climate change. Some of the members attended Beeston Green fair and Veolia recycling plant as part of their campaign and to widen their knowledge. The environment was second on 2022 make your mark vote in Nottinghamshire with covid recovery being first.

An example of the Pioneers work is the ongoing involvement in the Notts Help Yourself website where the pioneers are digital testers. They are ensuring continued accessibility and relevant information is displayed. Part of this work has involved working with young people at our link clubs and devising challenges to see how easy it is to find relevant information. They then feedback to the Notts Help Yourself development team with their findings and suggestions.





## Children in Care Council 'No labels'

Nottinghamshire's Children in Care Council 'No Labels' meets six times a year and has several representatives from the Children in Care Council subgroups. The meeting is chaired by young people and involves senior officers and elected members. Young people share current projects and pieces of work that they have been involved with along with raising issues.

No labels and the subgroups provide forums for young people who are looked after to be listened to and have an active role in shaping the services affecting them. The subgroups are:

- Looked after Play consultation 3-7 Years
- Looked after Junior subgroup 8-12 Years
- Looked after Senior subgroup 13-18 Years
- Leaving Care subgroup 16-21 Years

The subgroups meet and engage young people in consultation, develop artwork, produce videos, provide opportunities to learn life skills, share their experiences and influence changes to the services they access. These are examples of some of the work the Children in Care Council have been involved with during the last year.



## Safeguarding Partnership

The Children in Care Council worked with Hilary Poyner to have a direct say on the new Nottinghamshire County Council business plan for safeguarding. Emma and Hilary delivered youth work activities to make the information accessible for young people and as a result young people's views have been included and are now incorporated in the aims, objectives, outcomes of the plan.

## Fostering conference at John Fretwell

A young person gave an inspirational speech on their life in care, the experiences, challenges, strengths and improvements of the care system. They delivered a short presentation on the Children in Care Council and played the 'Poems' our real-life stories.



## Young People's Centre Management committees

Youth workers ensure that young people are given the opportunity to influence and shape the provision they access through management committees. Membership is open to all, young people set the agenda, the length, how often and where meetings take place. Youth workers will share any relevant information to their District and Borough Youth Forum. Young people are also encouraged to attend their local District & Borough Youth Forums. An example of this is Selston young people's management committee which attended both the recent interview training and the youth club visits training. These opportunities enabled them to step outside of their club and help shape the ongoing development of provision across the county.



## Voices of adoption

The voice of adoption youth forum is a group of adopted young people aged 11 to 18 who meet six times a year on Saturdays between 10am to 2pm. This group is facilitated by social care and supported by youth workers.

The forum links with other groups and local authorities, complete project work, talk about and relate their experience of being adopted to the projects. It's a fantastic way for adopted young people to build their confidence, socialise, talk about any issues, and make new friends.

Young people on this forum plan activity days for other adopted young people where they trial activities and give feedback and suggestions. They plan the menus and are involved in deciding how the budget is spent. These activity days are an important part of the Voices of adoption calendar and the shaping of them by young people is testament to their success.

The photographs show young people baking and doing crafts at recent events.





# Our aspirations and plans for 2024-2025

Here are some of the ways in which we plan to continue to support voice, influence and change in the coming year.

- ✓ The Children and Families Participation Network will continue to meet four times a year to help put into action Our Approach to Participation with children, young people, and families, celebrate what is happening, share learning, and make sure that people's voices are having an influence and helping make positive changes.
- ✓ We are reviewing the way we make sure that the learning gained from participation activities across the department has an impact on the experiences and outcomes of children and young people, and their families and carers. This will involve strengthening connections and communication with key influencers and decision makers including the extended leadership team and the lead cabinet member for children's services. We want to support them with their roles and responsibility to listen to children, young people, parents, and carers when things are going well, and when gaps in the service have been identified and there are opportunities for improvements.
- ✓ We are beginning to gather more information about how teams and services are listening and learning across the Children and Families department through their annual service plans. We are inviting services to let the Strengths-Based Team and Participation Network know what support they need to do this so that we can share learning and help enable more participation activities to take place.
- ✓ A plan for how we will continue to support participation and coproduction with children and young people who have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and their families is being developed in collaboration with them and key partners. This includes a framework to identify the key actions required to deliver improvements, including how support and services are making a difference to the experiences and outcomes of children, young people with SEND and their families.
- ✓ Following the success of our strengths-based whole service events and to help embed Our Nottinghamshire Approach and our value of listening and learning, we are excited to be planning Listening and Learning Week to take place Monday 16 - 23 October 2024. It will be a week of activities, workshops and events focused on hearing and learning from children, young people and families who have experience of Nottinghamshire support and services, and each other.



# Appendix 1:

Description of local participation activities/key terms included in the voice, influence and change activity map (not previously described)



## Participation activities focused on the individual:

### **Pathway plans for looked after children and care leavers**

All looked after children are supported to develop a 'pathway plan' when they reach 16 to help prepare them for leaving care. This includes the plans for the young person's health, education, training and development, the contact with their family and money, and the support they will get with these. Personal advisors take part in pathway plan reviews with the young person until they are 21, or 25 if they would like the support to continue. The young person's views are central to their plan.

### **Personal Education Plans for looked after children**

Every child and young person in care (3 years to 18 years old) must have a Personal Education Plan. The plan records the child or young person's education and training, describing what needs to happen to allow them to reach their goals. Plans should be a co-production activity, developed and reviewed termly with the child or young person, their education setting, carers, and other professionals. It should include the child or young person's views and provide the journey of their education.

### **The Key - Peer Support and Co-production Service**

The service is for families of children and young people with autism and/or learning disabilities up to the age of 25 in Nottinghamshire. The Key can provide information and signposting to useful agencies and organisations and provides parent/carers with a space to share thoughts, feelings and experiences with others.

### **Participation in multi-agency meetings and reviews**

Multi-agency meetings and reviews provide a space for all professionals supporting a child, young person, and their family to come together to discuss what is going well, the support they are offering and anything which is needed to help improve things. It is important that the voices of children, young people, parents and carers are heard in these meetings so that effective support can be offered which builds on the family's strengths.

## **Direct work/life story work**

Direct work is a term which is sometimes used to describe time that is spent with a child or young person when there is a specific purpose. The focus of the time might be to understand what life is like for the child or young people, explore their memories of events, help them to process traumatic experiences, talk about a significant change happening in their life, or to understand their wishes and feelings about their plan. For children and young people to get to know their worker(s), they need time to build a relationship and trust. Direct work can be done through conversations, play and other creative ways, supporting children who are both verbal and non-verbal to express their views, wishes and feelings. Life story work is when workers help children and young people to understand their life journey.

## **Home/establishment visits**

Home visits are where a professional visits a family or young person in the place they are living as part of the support they are offering. They provide an opportunity for children, young people and families to share their views and ideas about the support they are receiving, how this might be helping them, and anything which could be improved. It is important that we learn from these conversations so that we know what is working well and try to make changes when we hear that things could be better. The word establishment is a term used here to describe when a worker might visit a child outside of their home, but in another place they are living or spending time in such as their school, hospital, a secure unit or prison.

## **Advocacy Services**

Advocacy Services are independent services aimed at helping people understand their rights and express their views. They help people to be involved in the decisions that affect their lives.

## **Social work reports for meetings and reviews**

When social workers are working with children and young people who have a plan of support, they sometimes write a report for the meeting or review. A key part of the report will be describing the views, wishes and feelings of the children or young people, their parents or carers and other important people in their lives.

## **Views/voices shared with foster and residential carers**

Foster and residential carers are keen to understand the views, wishes and feelings of the children and young people they care for. They are asked to support children and young people to talk about their views and wishes or share them on their behalf. The views of carers are valued when important decisions are being made.

## **Family networking**

Family networking is about involving people who know and care about children and their family when they need help. This might include family members, friends and important people to the family.

## **Family Group Conferencing**

A family group conference is a family-led meeting where the family and friends network coming together to make a plan for the child or young person and their family. The process is supported by a co-ordinator who helps prepare the family for the meeting. In Nottinghamshire the Family Service help facilitate family group conferences.

## Education, Health and Care Plans

An Education, Health and Care plan is a legal document which describes a child or young person's special educational needs, the support they need, and the outcomes they would like to achieve. The plan looks at all the needs that a child or young person has within education, health, and care. Professionals and the child, young person and their family together consider what outcomes they would like to see for the child or young person by the end of a key stage and the plan identifies what is needed to achieve those outcomes. The views of the child or young person and their family are central to the plan.

## Supervision and 360 reviews in the Youth Justice Service

Supervision is when a worker meets with their manager to talk about the families they are working with, what is going well and the plan for support moving forward. The views, wishes and feelings of the family are a key part of these discussions. In the Youth Justice Service families are also being asked for feedback to help the learning and development of staff. Staff have found this very valuable.



## Participation activities focused on service/team learning:

### Family Service end-of-support questionnaire

When the support that families receive from the Family Service comes to an end, they are sent a link to an online survey to give feedback on their experience. The survey is in its early days, and the service is looking at how the views of families collected can be reviewed and used to make improvements to their experiences and the Family Service.

### Family Hubs co-production

The views and ideas of children and families have been central to the development of Family Hub Networks in Nottinghamshire. This is to make sure the support and services provided by family hubs meet the needs of local families and other stakeholders. Feedback from co-production activities is assessed on an on-going basis to ensure that the development of family hubs in all areas reflects the needs of children, young people, parents, carers and partner agencies.

### Care leavers' coffee mornings/drop-ins

Care leavers' Coffee and Cake drop-ins are monthly informal meetings for care leavers aged 21 to 24. They are hosted by the Leaving Care Service 21-plus Team and form part of the Team's activities to listen to young people's views to inform and influence what the service does. The drop-ins are an opportunity for young people to share their views, as well as a chance to just say "hi" and catch-up with their previous personal advisor or achievement advisor and to explore any support they may need. Young people are also able to share their views in response to a bi-monthly e-newsletter.

## **Nottinghamshire Parent/Carer Forum**

Nottinghamshire Parent/Carer Forum is a registered charity run by, and for, parents/carers of children and young people with an additional need and/or disability. Its purpose is to be the voice of these families, to gather their views and experiences, and then work in partnership with Nottinghamshire County Council and other providers in education, health and social care to help shape and improve support and services. Forum representatives are actively involved in the local area's governance structure to ensure that parents, carers and their children are at the centre of the decision-making process. The chair of the Forum is a member of the Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Improvement Board and SEND Executive Leadership Group. There are also three Parent/Carer members on the Nottinghamshire SEND Partnership Assurance and Improvement Group.

## **Complaints, compliments and suggestions**

In Nottinghamshire we want to hear views about our service, good or bad. What people tell us helps improve services and plan for the future. We are in the process of reviewing how we can best learn from feedback and complaints so that we know and can continue to provide support and services which are helpful and try and change things when improvements are needed.

## **Residential homes voice groups**

Residential homes in Nottinghamshire are keen to listen and learn from the young people who live in them. Each home provides opportunities for young people to share their views and ideas on how the home can be run in the best way possible, to try and make sure that everyone living there can be safe, happy, healthy and have fun.

## **Quality of Practice Reviews**

Quality of Practice Reviews are structured discussions between a practitioner (for example, a social worker) and a reviewer (for example, a social work manager) to create a learning and reflective space to consider specific elements of professional practice and how they have impacted the child or young person and their family or carers. A key component of the review is to ask the child/young person and their parents or carers for their views on their experience of services. Finding out whether and how they think the service has made a difference to them and what the service could do better is intended to inform wider learning and service improvement at all levels of the system, including for children and their families.

## **Initial and Review Meetings Feedback Form**

The Initial and Review Meetings Feedback Form, launched in February 2024, provides all participants of child protection meetings, looked after children reviews, child exploitation meetings, child in need supervision order meetings, and any other statutory meeting for children in need of care and protection, with the opportunity to provide feedback on their experience of the meeting. The link and QR code to the online form is shared with the child/young person, parent/carer, social worker, other professional at the end of each meeting so they can share their views. Social workers are encouraged to support children, young people and parents/carers to complete the form when needed. Responses from the questionnaire will identify good practice as well as opportunities to make changes to improve children and families' experiences of, and outcomes from, statutory meetings.

## **Fostering hubs**

Fostering hubs provide a space for foster carers to come together for peer support. The views of carers are also able to be shared back through their workers and through the Foster Liaison Advisory Group.

## **Wishing Walls**

All young people's centres have a wishing wall that enables young people to put forward ideas and thoughts through completing a suggestion slip. Workers will complete a response and display the form on the wishing wall. Some will require discussion at the young people's centre management committee.

## **Kinship Co-production group for carers**

We are in the process of trying to set up a co-production group for Kinship carers to provide a space to listen to their experiences, hear what is going well and think together about how services for kinship carers and the children and young people they are caring for could be improved. We will be inviting some carers to be part of the planning for this in May 2024 in the hope that we can set up an ongoing group which current and new carers can feel able to get involved with.

## **Newark Family Support and Safeguarding Team Feedback Form**

The Newark Family Support and Safeguarding Team is working in a multi-disciplinary way to support and provide help, protection and care to children, young people and families in Newark. The team have set up a form to try and learn from people's experiences of the service, what is going well, and where improvements can be made. Families are provided with a link to complete the form after being supported by the team.

## **Stronger Families Team feedback form**

The Stronger Families Team aims to offer six weeks' worth of intensive support to children and their families where a breakdown in living arrangements appears to be imminent. The team will work with the family to create their own support plan and find solutions through brief but intensive periods of intervention working with parents, young people and the family as a whole. The team ask for feedback from families to learn about how the support has helped, and if there is anything about the service which could be improved.

## **Adoption East Midlands Co-production groups**

Adoption East Midlands provides a range of support services for adoptive families, adopted adults and birth families, designed to offer the right level of support at the right time throughout their adoption journey. They have been running themed co-production groups to learn from the experiences of adopters and look at how services could be improved to better meet the needs of adopters and the children and young people in their care.

## **Holiday Activities and Food Programme family consultation**

The Holiday Activities and Food programme (HAF) supports the wellbeing of children between 5 – 16 years by providing a variety of activities and food during school holidays. It offer activities and food for children who receive benefits-related free school meals during the Spring (Easter), Summer, Autumn (October) and Winter (Christmas) holidays across the county. Some of the activities involve families so that we can hear about their experiences and consult with them on important matters relating to services, support and spaces families use across Nottinghamshire.

## **Empowering People Empowering Communities**

The Empowering Parents, Empowering Communities (EPEC) programme is an internationally recognised evidence-based peer-led parenting programme. The programme provides a system for training and supervising parent-led parenting groups that help parents to learn practical parenting skills for everyday family life and develop their abilities to bring up confident, happy and co-operative children.

## **Foster Liaison Advisory Group**

The Foster Liaison Advisory Group is an opportunity for foster carers to come together to network in a supportive environment. Meetings of the network take place quarterly and are attended by foster carers and members of the fostering service.



## **Spaces where the focus of the group is on learning from people and enabling change with a primary focus on participation:**

### **The Listening Group**

Nottinghamshire Children and Families have been taking part in a co-design programme with Relational Activism, which is a group of parents, young people and professionals working together with lived and learned experience. Twelve colleagues (senior practitioners, social workers, team managers, service managers, a group manager and child protection coordinator) formed 'The Listening Group' in November 2023 having been involved in a series of 6 sessions with Relational Activism. The sessions focused on facilitating participation, co-design, and models for how we could bring parents together.

The Listening Group started to contact parents to hear and learn from their experiences of child protection planning and processes. They are leading on the setting up of parent coffee mornings, and helping review how we can learn from activities with children, young people, parents and carers so that we make sure that their voices have influence on the design, delivery and review of child in need and child protection support and processes

## **Spaces where learning from participation activity is/can be shared with people who can help influence the development of services, teams and practice locally:**

### **Select Committee/Cabinet**

Cabinet and cabinet members make the majority of decisions about Council services. Select Committee scrutinises the effectiveness of services for children and families to support improvement. Part of the role of the lead cabinet member for children's services is to listen to children, young people, parents and carers in order to identify gaps in service or service improvements.

### **Senior Leadership Team/Extended Leadership Team**

The Senior Leadership Team is the four Children and Families Department Directors and Corporate Director. The Extended Leadership Team is the group of people who are responsible for planning, delivering and evaluating the effectiveness of children and family services in Nottinghamshire. Every month when the Extended Leadership Team meet, they begin by sharing their experiences of meeting with children, young people, parents, carers and families that month and what has been learnt from this. They are keen to champion Our Nottinghamshire Approach and help embed a culture of listening and learning across the department.

## Learning and Improvement Board

The Learning and Improvement Board has the responsibility to ensure that the Children and Families Department meets its regulatory and corporate requirements. The Board makes sure that there is effective leadership, management, and operations across the department. The ultimate vision for the Board is that we are consistently ambitious to achieve excellence for our services, so we have the best outcomes for children and young people in Nottinghamshire.

## Practice Improvement Meetings

The group of managers who attend practice improvement meetings have a responsibility to understand the quality of practice and services, and children and families' experiences. They are responsible for making sure that the support and services families receive is good, and improving the quality of practice when this could be better.

## Corporate Parenting Panel

The Corporate Parenting Panel was established to assist the Council in fulfilling its legal corporate parenting duties and ensure the Council and partner agencies act as effective corporate parents. The Panel will invite members of the Children Looked After and Care Leavers Partnership Board, the Foster Carers Liaison Group and the No Labels Group (Children in Care Council) to attend meetings and input.

