The Parent, Carers and Families Voice and Influence Group includes representatives from different organisations such as Police, Children’s Services, Social Care and Health and voluntary organisations who come together to discuss how parents, carers and families can have more of a voice and influence within Leeds.

The group have developed this information pack to assist and support organisations wanting to ensure the voice and influence of parents and carers is embedded in service decisions.

“Having a voice and influence means that parents, carers and families are supported to have their voices heard, to enable them to have an influence over decisions and actions that affect their family.”

Do you seek and respond to the views of parents carers and families?

Examples from other organisations how they seek the views of parents

How to advertise opportunities to parents and carers

Checklist for involving parents and carers in strategic meetings

For more information about the voice and influence of parents and carers visit [http://tinyurl.com/PCFLeeds](http://tinyurl.com/PCFLeeds) or contact the Voice and Influence Team at [vic@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:vic@leeds.gov.uk)
Voice and Influence of Parents, Carers and Families

Benefits to parents, carers and families
By actively involving parents, carers and families in decision making processes, organisations and services are demonstrating their commitment to their service users, showing they see them as key stakeholders

- Effective parent and carer voice and influence plays a central role in improving outcomes for children and young people, for example in schools this can lead to improved attendance and attainment
- If parents, carers and families feel listened to and heard and that their opinions are valued, they are more likely to encourage their children to trust, engage and share their views with professionals
- Improved relationships with staff and volunteers due to increased understanding and trust
- Parents, carers and families confidence and skills can increase enabling them to be more likely to speak out if they have concern or issues they want to raise
- Working with professionals helps parents and carers to understand the complexities involved and the challenges faced by the professionals who have to bring about change to services

Benefits to staff and organisations
Parents and carers views and voice in the developments of services and their evaluation of ‘what works’ is central to ensuring the service is meeting their needs

- Working together enables parents and carers to identify solutions that work, these solutions may also save money by professionals spending money on services parents and carers do not want
- Parents and carers expectations are more realistic as they become more aware of the reality of delivering services within funding limitations
- As services improve, staff can often feel a sense of achievement and confidence and continued enthusiasm to improve services through engaging parents and carers in decision making
The terms “participation” “empowerment” and “active engagement” often need explaining, as these can be confusing to understand. Therefore we are using the collective term “voice and influence” to describe all of the above activities.

Definition: “Having a voice and influence means that parents, carers and families are supported to have their voices heard, to enable them to have an influence over decisions and actions that affect their family.”

The voice and influence of parents / carers happens at different levels depending on the requirements of the service / organisation (information, consultation and participation).

There are lots of different models of participation available; however one size does not fit all. The table below describe different approaches to assist you in understanding and reviewing how your organisation / service enable parents and carers to have a voice and influence.

All information provided to parents and carers should be in an accessible format.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Participation</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Typical Methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No participation</td>
<td>Organisations decide what to do without any consideration or involvement of parents or carers who use their service.</td>
<td>Parents and carer are not consulted or given a chance to feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decoration / Manipulation</td>
<td>Organisations decide what to do but parents and carers don’t understand the issues being dealt with or actions taking place and have no influence over decisions.</td>
<td>Information is shared with parents and carers, they may “participate” by being present at an event / meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tokenism (lip service)</td>
<td>Organisations decide what to do, parents and carers are given limited voice and choice about what they can say and how they can communicate and therefore minimal influence into decisions being made.</td>
<td>Parents and carers are asked to take an advisory role with no decision making power or asked to be a parent representative at a meeting with no guidance and support to understand their role.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultation</td>
<td>Organisations seek and respond to the views of parents and carers on issues they can influence and change and parents / carers receive feedback on how their input has influenced decisions.</td>
<td>Consultations take place via surveys, focus groups and public meetings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint decision making</td>
<td>Organisations and parents and carers work in partnership to make decisions, they may decide and agree on priorities and work together to plan, develop and review services</td>
<td>Parents and carers are invited to sit on decision making boards / recruitment panels and make decisions jointly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent and carers lead with help from organisation</td>
<td>Parents and carers lead in designing developing and implementing their own projects with help from services</td>
<td>Parents and carers are given the role of managing a project and making key decisions with support from services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent initiated, shared decision with organisation (Partnership)</td>
<td>Parents and carers involving organisations in their planning and managing of a project collectively.</td>
<td>Parents and carers independently initiate a project and then involve organisations in its development.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Strategic Boards and Steering Groups for children, young people and families

Do you seek and respond to the views of parents, carers and families?

- YES
  - Review the process you use
  - Consider the reasons why?
    - i.e. is it appropriate
- NO
  - Is your approach successful and are parents/carers you engage with representative of your service users?
    - YES
      - Not considered it before
      - Considering what approach would work for you
      - Approach we used wasn’t successful
      - Consultations
        - PCF Representative
          - Members of the board could meet with existing PCF groups
        - Advisory Groups
          - Tell the Voice and Influence Team about it (vic@leeds.gov.uk)
    - NO
      - Consider the reasons why?
        - Tried it before, wasn’t successful
        - Approach we used wasn’t successful
        - Consultations
          - See section on ways to share consultation information
      - Don’t have access to parents/carers
        - See section for routes to access parents/carers
      - No scope for it/not appropriate/timescales don’t allow for consultation

Contact the Voice and Influence Team should you require any further guidance and support
vic@leeds.gov.uk

Have a look at the good practice examples section
Have a look at the checklist for involving parents/carers in meetings
**Good Practice Examples**

There are lots of ways to include the voices of parents, carers and families. Services and organisations from around Leeds are using different methods. To find out more about ways to involve parents, carers and families in your work read the below examples.

**NHS Leeds South and East Clinical Commissioning Group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>How parents / carers have a voice and influence</th>
<th>What works well</th>
<th>Challenges faces</th>
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<tr>
<td>For engagement around our general commissioning intentions and on specific commissioning projects, we use a variety of approaches. A community asset based approach (ABE) involves using our best asset, the local community. Working with individual third sector community groups as the direct enabler to have those conversations for us within their own communities. We also work closely with Leeds Involving People on individual projects as well as Healthwatch.</td>
<td>Through different mechanisms such as focus groups, task and finish groups, survey, street talk. Our Neighbourhood Leaders tell us what they think of local services and to champion the wider voice of their community. They also support us by spreading the word about services and local and national campaigns.</td>
<td>Targeted work through ABE approach ensure the voice of parents and carers was heard – but for specific engagement activities. Good robust group of active citizens who are experts of their own environment – We also have plans to train the group in procurement skills. Can engage with people who are unable to attend meetings (armchair involvement).</td>
<td>difficult to engage generally with parents/carers, except through targeted work. Can be difficult to recruit to every area but we have a plan and hopefully will fill any gaps this year Recruitment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>We also have a Neighbourhood Leader Group comprising members of the public/patients that represent our local council wards</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patient Assurance Group – 2 patient members – looking for third and trying to target younger mum.</td>
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<tr>
<td>MyNHSMyVoice: open forum for all patients, members of the public to have a voice.</td>
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**Bankside Primary**

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| The recruitment and retention of governors was an issue. We discussed the need to support parents to partake in decision making and development of parental voice and involvement hence parent’s council was borne. | Parents and carers on the group can set the topics for discussion / issues on agenda / themes for training or information sessions.  
Parents and carers not only raise issues but they get actively involved in tackling the issue e.g. parking around school.  
Parents and carers meet with local councillors to share their views on local issues that need tackling e.g. litter.  
Meetings are chaired by the Assistant Head teacher and all issues raised and discussed by parents and carers are included in the minutes which are circulated to all school staff. | Range of communication approaches Including:  
Every school staff member gets the minutes of the meetings and so does the local Police Support Officer.  
Reminder texts are sent to parents the day before and the same day and ask parents if any items for the agenda.  
The parents have set up their own WhatsApp group | Meetings were initially once every half term but not enough so now they are monthly. |

**Parent feedback:**

“It's so great because it is informal and we can ask questions we really want to ask”

“I feel I am contributing to my community”.

“It’s important because we are interdependent on each other and so the kids connect us together Children have always had a connection with the school and teachers and this has helped us and now we have the connection too- its our school and the parent council bonded us to it”

“I have grown in confidence, I never spoke and now I can confidently share my ideas. My children feel proud of me when they saw my name on the parent council letter.”

“I can be a parent on the parent council as on the governing body I felt I had to represent the school and so here I feel I can be more true to myself.”
### Children’s Centres

#### Approach
- Consultation events on a monthly cycle.
- Solution focussed Approach
- Discussion at Advisory meetings ensures parent’s feed in their views and comments regarding the provision.
- Listening and Responding Appropriately.
- Value the contribution good or not so good.

#### How parents / carers have a voice and influence
- Parent’s views and consultations are fed into planning for the services.

#### What works well
- Respect and Listening to the voice of parents and carers.
- Acting on their ideas and suggestions wherever this is possible.
- Consulting on the things that are important to them.
- Ensuring their responses are fed back to others “You said, we did” approach.
- A warm and friendly approach.
- Open, honest and transparent approach.

#### Challenges faces
- Balancing parental expectations against a professional approach and a framework for Inspection can sometimes be a challenge. This can often be worked through with a sensitive approach.

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**Example of parents / carer voice and influence**

At a recent meeting parents were asked to approve an outdoor play policy. As a result of reading the policy parents told us they did not feel children played outside enough in the fresh air and questioned why this was not enforceable like sitting down for lunch.

Parents saw the benefit of the outdoor provision but felt some of the children did not fully utilise it.

The centres took this on board and undertook a consultation with other parents in the centres ensuring all views were collected. Data and feedback on the consultation were provided to parents in the Advisory meeting.

The children were also involved in this consultation, with the older children taking part in a tallying event every time they went outside to play. The children drew pictures of their outdoor experiences and photographs of children were also taken. A display was provided in the centre to promote the benefits of the outdoor environments.

The parents representatives at the meeting were able to scrutinise the information and look at the evidence presented. The parents were able to question and challenge and tasked Managers to further promote outdoor play in the setting ensuring that “All” children and not “MOST” were spending time in the outdoor environment during the course of the day. Parents asked for on-going feedback of this initiative at future meetings.
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<td>Parents have a role in all governing bodies in maintained schools. Each governing body constitution must have a minimum of two elected parent representatives. GSS gives a full training programme which is open to all governors and offers a skills audit and recommends appropriate training</td>
<td>Some schools have a parent council which produces feedback and insight to governors, I am working to encourage parent councils and supporting schools in embedding them</td>
<td>More support for parents through evaluation of the challenges they may have in common is effective.</td>
<td>The nature of governing body meetings is such that they can be off putting to parents. Parents tend to resign after a short time after realising the amount of commitment and responsibility involved</td>
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### Housing Leeds

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<td>Leeds Parent Champions Positive Families Scheme, now being delivered Citywide over a 2 year period and Winner of the Family &amp; Childcare Trust Parenting Programme of the Year Award.</td>
<td>Through the Programme we have enlisted volunteers to our Housing Advisory Panels, Represented Groups and they have their own Facebook Page, Twitter Account etc. Parent Champions can now access the Council’s Involved Groups Training Programme to help them build confidence and engage their communities.</td>
<td>We have found that Parents who attend our Programme are more likely to open up and engage as a Group of Friends rather than talk to officers in Authority, Confidence is built they have a Goal to aim for and Training is provided to improve their skills, Once they become Parent Champions they are supported by ourselves and the Family &amp; Childcare Trust to deliver key messages and signpost to services within their own communities.</td>
<td>The biggest challenge having the time to facilitate the Course now it has gone citywide, We have linked in with the local Children’s centres and are hoping to deliver a joint programme that links in Children’s Services and Housing going Forward. As it takes 3 months to deliver in each area our biggest challenge is how to develop the programme so we can run separate ones in different parts of the City this of course has resource and financial challenge in our current Financial budget position across the Council.</td>
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</table>

We now have 9 Active Parent Champions on the back of our Parenting Courses which have been delivered in The East, West and South of the City, Parent Champions now have their own Facebook Page and engage other Parents in their communities and Gala's, ’Fun Days, Coffee Mornings, School Gates, Supermarkets etc, The Parent Champions are now linked in to our YAGI (Young Adults Getting Involved) Group to deliver key messages to our Younger Target Audience.
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<td>Make service widely known via website, posters in schools and public buildings, range or leaflets. Inform, Advise and Support. Service surveys. Always feedback. Parents self-refer into the service. Ask parents what they want, and how they want to address situations. Choice and flexibility.</td>
<td>Parents and carers are involved in staff recruitment for the service. Parents vice chair the Service Advisory Board. Parents and carers volunteer for the service. All aspects of the service are evaluated on a case closure basis.</td>
<td>Parents are informed about the service we offer and use the information we give them to make informed decisions about their children’s education. Parents become more confident and empowered. When parents are confident and empowered they are more like to become further involved have their say and shape service delivery.</td>
<td>Capacity to train and recruit volunteers.</td>
</tr>
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### Leeds Family Group Conference Service

**Approach**
The FGC service has an adult service user group which meets monthly and is open to any family or network members who have been involved in a FGC. Family members are involved with the FGC service for a time limited period so we do not communicate with them on an ongoing basis. Currently re designing our way of getting feedback from families.

**How parents / carers have a voice and influence**
All those involved in a FGC receive a feedback form asking for their views about the FGC process and the service. Any responses which are not positive or express concerns are followed up by phone.

Any changes to the service – changes in documentation etc are discussed with the service user group. The service user group is involved in recruitment of FGC coordinators and in the training they received.

Representatives from the CSWS attend the service user group to hear parents / carers views about FGC and the social work service.

**Challenges faces**
FGC service works with families for a time limited period – challenge in getting family members to join the service user group. Very small number of service users involved at present – their experience of FGC is now some time ago. Challenge in getting more fathers or father figures to attend.
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<tr>
<td>As part of our Best Start development work in Bramley we have been working very closely with the Bramley Children’s Centre in order to align services to be delivered from the Centre and to help us collate valuable local intelligence.</td>
<td>The Children’s Centre is a lead partner in our work particularly looking at why our most vulnerable parents are not engaging in local services and how we can encourage these parents to participate. They are able to speak directly to parents in a way in which we are not able to achieve.</td>
<td>The Children’s Centre has provided advice and expertise on local families, parents and carers which we would not have been able to access through other stakeholders due to the mandatory data collection requirements of the Children’s Centre. This data has helped the Best Start Bramley steering group make informed and enlightened decisions for local initiatives in line with the Best Start objectives. An example of this was a joint initiative with local Library services where resources were shared and available not only at local libraries (where some young parents who had experienced toxic experiences at school were reluctant to go) but at a place (the Children’s Centre) where they felt comfortable in. This helped to improve ‘school readiness’ for the children attending. The Children’s Centre has opened the door to our target audience within schools and provided a vital communication route for initiatives, programmes, intelligence and joint working.</td>
<td>Without the support of the Children’s Centre we would have been unable to obtain such rich local intelligence.</td>
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</table>

**Fostering Service**
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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foster Carers (of all types and approval) are integral to the development of the Fostering Service. We have a range of established and developing routes for carers to provide their views – to the service, to leadership and corporately. Foster Carers are considered as ‘stakeholders’ and have active voice and influence via established forums through nominated representatives from support groups and by invitation from service to participate in service developments. The Service works closely with the independent Leeds Foster Carer Association (LFCA) and their representatives to assist with their efforts to promote Leeds fostering and assist with maximising good outcomes for the children and young people they care for.</td>
<td>• Representation to the Foster Carer Liaison Group (FCLG) from LFCA and carers elected from their support groups. FCLG has Leadership, Corporate Carer (Cllr), Fostering Service Management and Staff representation plus Health, Voice and influence, Virtual School. Carer reps set their own agenda for the meeting. • As carer stakeholders in established reviewing of aspects of fostering service (e.g. annual review of financial support to carers arrangements) and as stakeholders in new service developments (e.g. Staying Put Policy – former foster carers continuing to support young people age 18 -21yrs) • Via representation at Corporate Carers and by invitation to other forums / developments e.g. New Belongings • Individual views of carers are sought periodically from service via survey’s and from their support groups. • Incorporation of care stakeholder views in the Fostering Service Development Plan</td>
<td>FCLG as an established route for carer voice and influence, particularly on service policy development and leadership awareness of concerns to carers Carers as ‘stakeholders’ in service considerations and actions regarding range of fostering service developments - a Partnership approach assisting with maximising good outcomes for the children / young people they care for</td>
<td>Given the size of the Service (c 700 approved foster carer households) ensuring that as many carer views as possible are encouraged, including those outside established formal forums and representation.</td>
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</table>
Routes to access parents / carers

The Parent, Carer and Families Voice and Influence Group
The Parent, Carer and Families Voice and Influence Group meet on a quarterly basis to primarily work towards
Strengthen the voice of parents, carers and families
- Improve representation of parents, carers and families across the services in which we work
- The multi-agency partnership group represent organisations and services that actively promote the voice
  and influence of parents, carers and families they work with and
- Ensure that services actively involve parents, carers and families, hear what they have to say, feedback
  following consultation and participation and work together to improve outcomes and lead to positive
  change

The group has over 40 active and virtual members and any requests can be sent out to the group via the Voice,
Influence and Change Team (vic@leeds.gov.uk)

Social Media
Social media is a great way to make requests and share messages. If you haven’t got your own twitter account
you can always ask the Family Information Service to tweet on your behalf (family.info@leeds.gov.uk)

Governor Bulletin
If you would like a request for parent / carer representation to go in the governor bulletin which is sent out to all
parent governors you can do this by contacting the Governors Support Service,
education.governors@leeds.gov.uk

Parent Councils
Parent Councils are based within the school setting and are an opportunity for parents / carers to come together
to discuss issues that affect the school and the community.

To find out more about parent councils contact the Voice, Influence and Change Team (vic@leeds.gov.uk)
Checklist for involving parents / carers in meetings

Thinking about a parent / carer representative?
- Think about ‘why’ you want a parent / carer representative
- What will their role and function be? Write a role description
  - Is their role advisory or do they have voting rights?
  - What do you expect from them i.e. turning up to meetings on time, contribution
  - What is in it for the parent / carer i.e. skills
  - What can the parent / carer expect from the board
- Consider the 9 protected characteristics when considering representation (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or believe, sex and sexual orientation)

Making a meeting accessible
- Time of the meeting
- Is the venue accessible i.e. location
- Do you need to provide crèche facilities?
- Can you provide out of pocket expenses?
- Do you require an interpreter?

Before the meeting
- Provide parent / carer with easy to understand Terms of Reference and attendees list
- Do you have a named contact person for the parent / carer
- Send out visually appealing agendas and documents to the parent / carer prior to the meeting
- Arrange to meet the parent / carer if required

At the meeting
- Offer the parent / carer a cup of tea
- Introductions and a check in
- Ensure you don’t use jargon / explain what everything means

After the meeting
- Ensure expenses are covered
- Send meetings of the meeting and ‘thank’ the parent / carer for their time

Review
- Ask the parent / carer if they think they have a meaningful role
- Ask the board is they think it is working. If not, refer to the flowchart of involvement