Background: Leeds Children & Families Services recognise the importance of family support services for children, young people and their families. In 2017/18 we undertook a review of family support services to make sure that the services we have in place continue to meet the needs of families.

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| Approach: how parents/carers had a voice? | What works well? | Challenges faced |
| It was important to us when embarking on a family support review that we heard directly from families; including parents/carers about their experiences of family support.We held a number of consultation sessions for Practitioners/Managers of family support services and parents were invited. It was very important to us that parents felt their feedback was equally as important as Practitioner/Managers views. A number of parents attended the sessions but we acknowledge that many parents don’t necessarily feel comfortable with this type of meeting so we also looked at other ways to listen to parents/families.We visited a number of existing services to talk to people who have accessed family support about what they liked, what they wanted and what made a difference to them. We also used an online survey to gauge the views of families who we hadn’t been able to engage with on a face to face basis. Once we had consulted with families and decided which type of service we wanted to commission it was then important to us that families were involved in helping choose which provider was successful in winning the contract. We had a parent’s panel who listened and watched a presentation from each of the providers who had applied to deliver the new family support service. The parents scored the presentations and these scores formed part of the overall bidder’s tender score. Parents were allocated 20% of the overall score which meant they’re views had a definite ability to influence the overall winner of the contract.  | Involving parents in all stages of the process works well. This includes understanding what currently works, what doesn’t work so well and also understanding what has helped to make the most difference to their family’s lives.When consulting with families we find that going to places where families/parents/carers already meet is most effective; rather than expecting them to go out of their way to meet with us. Providing the opportunity for parents/carers to give us their feedback via online surveys helps us to engage with those parents who may struggle with face to face conversations. It’s important that once families have helped us to design a service that they are involved in helping to determine which providers wins the contract. From experience we have found parents meeting the bidders face to face is most effective in helping parents to make a decision about this. We generally do this by asking providers to a presentation to a group of parents. We work with our colleagues in the Voice & Influence team to train/brief the parents beforehand on what to expect and what they need to do. | It takes planning and time to effectively consult and involve families/parents/carers in decision making. In the family support review we ensured that we allowed sufficient time within the review to meet with a range of groups that we felt appropriately represented the families in Leeds.It’s was important to us that we heard from families that understand what it’s like to need some support for their families. Consulting on a subject such as family support can sometimes be tricky: some parents who are in the middle of receiving support don’t feel comfortable in sharing their experiences. Similarly families who have received support and moved on with their lives often don’t want to ‘drag up’ past experiences. To respond to this challenge we linked in with providers of family support in Leeds and asked them to discreetly speak to parents and identify those, current & previous, who felt comfortable being involved in the review. This approach worked well and we were able to engage with a good range of parents. |