

<b>Report to:</b>	Council	<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	Thursday 20 April 2023
<b>Subject:</b>	Listening to the Voices of Children and Young People		
<b>Report of:</b>	Chief Executive	<b>Wards Affected:</b>	(All Wards);
<b>Portfolio:</b>	Cabinet Member - Children's Social Care, Cabinet Member - Education, Cabinet Member - Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services		
<b>Is this a Key Decision:</b>	N	<b>Included in Forward Plan:</b>	No
<b>Exempt / Confidential Report:</b>	N		

### Summary:

The Council and its partners have a duty to make sure that children and young people in Sefton are provided with opportunities to have their say and be heard.

This report summarises how the Council and partners have involved children and young people in the decision making to improve services, shape their communities for cared for children and care experienced young people involve them in all the decisions that affect their lives.

### Recommendation(s):

Council is asked to

(1) reaffirm its commitment to listening to the voices of children, young people and their families in the development of Council and partnership strategies.

(2) invite members of SYMBOL to attend and speak at a future Council meeting on a subject that is important to them.

### Reasons for the Recommendation(s):

There is strong evidence that working with and listening to children and young people wherever possible, instead of doing things to them or for them produces better outcomes and helps to build confidence and resilience. Children, young people and their parents and carers have a right to be involved in decisions that affect their lives. Having a voice and influence means they feel that their voices are listened to, valued and can influence decisions and actions.

### Alternative Options Considered and Rejected: (including any Risk Implications)

NA

**What will it cost and how will it be financed?**

**(A) Revenue Costs-There are no revenue costs associated with this report**

**(B) Capital Costs-there are no capital costs associated with this report**

**Implications of the Proposals:**

<b>Resource Implications (Financial, IT, Staffing and Assets):</b>	
<b>Legal Implications:</b> The Children and Families Act 2014 and the SEND Code of Practice make clear that it is important that local services available to children and families must be made available in a clear, easy to read manner.  Local authorities, health, schools and colleges and other organisations must involve families and children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in discussions and decisions.	
<b>Equality Implications:</b> Included within the report.	
<b>Impact on Children and Young People: Yes</b>  There is strong evidence that working with and listening to children and young people wherever possible, instead of doing things to them or for them produces better outcomes and helps to build confidence and resilience. Children, young people and their parents and carers have a right to be involved in decisions that affect their lives. Having a voice and influence means they feel that their voices are listened to, valued and can influence decisions and actions.	
<b>Climate Emergency Implications:</b>  The recommendations within this report will	
Have a positive impact	Y
Have a neutral impact	N
Have a negative impact	N
The Author has undertaken the Climate Emergency training for report authors	Y
Listening to the voices of children and young people is critical as the Council works with others to act as guardians and protect and maintain Sefton's natural beauty and ensure that its many assets can be enjoyed by everyone and future generations.	

**Contribution to the Council's Core Purpose:**

<p>Protect the most vulnerable: When listening carefully to children it is possible to see their experience from their point of view. Listening to the voices of vulnerable children is of paramount importance in keeping them safe, informing decisions that affect their lives and understanding if the interventions made are having the desired impact on a child's life.</p>
<p>Facilitate confident and resilient communities: Listening to the voices of children and young people is a key element of facilitating confident and resilient communities. Young and old listening to and working with each other will lead to sustainable change.</p>
<p>Commission, broker and provide core services: The active involvement of children and young people should be central to commissioning and service development, actively listening will deliver better outcomes.</p>
<p>Place – leadership and influencer: The Council uses feedback from our children and young people in shaping plans.</p> <p>The Council will demonstrate strong leadership and influence partner organisations to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• work towards common goals</li> <li>• deliver the best opportunities and outcomes for the children in young people in and leaving our care by being good Corporate Parents</li> <li>• deliver the best opportunities and outcomes for every child in Sefton</li> <li>• ensure Sefton is a child, older person and disability friendly place</li> <li>• and build pride in the borough.</li> </ul>
<p>Drivers of change and reform: Children's voices play a critical role in driving change and improving outcomes for Sefton residents, every child's future and continuously improve the borough.</p>
<p>Facilitate sustainable economic prosperity: Children's voices play a critical role in driving change and improving outcomes for Sefton residents.</p>
<p>Greater income for social investment: NA</p>
<p>Cleaner Greener Children's voices are key in this area as the Council works with others to act as guardians and protect and maintain Sefton's natural beauty and ensure that its many assets can be enjoyed by everyone and future generations.</p>

## **What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?**

### **(A) Internal Consultations**

The Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services (FD.7190/23) and the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer (LD.5390/23) have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

### **(B) External Consultations**

This report includes examples of consultation and engagement activity.

#### **Implementation Date for the Decision**

Immediately following the Council meeting.

<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Jan McMahon
Telephone Number:	Tel: 0151 934 4431
Email Address:	jan.mcmahon@sefton.gov.uk

**Appendices:**

A Youth Voice and Participation Toolkit

B SYMBOL report

C Family Wellbeing Shadow Board Case Studies

D Case studies

**Background Papers:**

[A Public Engagement And Consultation Framework \(sefton.gov.uk\)](http://sefton.gov.uk)

[Corporate Parenting Strategy](#)

## 1. Background

- 1.1 Article 12 of the UN convention on the rights of the child, which states that 'every child and young person has the right to express their views freely – about everything that affects them'.
- 1.2 There is strong evidence that working with and listening to children and young people wherever possible, instead of doing things to them or for them produces better outcomes and helps to build confidence and resilience. Children, young people and their parents and carers have a right to be involved in decisions that affect their lives. Having a voice and influence means they feel that their voices are listened to, valued and can influence decisions and actions.
- 1.3 In January 2023 the Council approved a new Consultation and Engagement Framework that explains how the Council and anyone it asks to do the work for the Council's behalf, will work with our communities and gives clear information on how to speak with and listen to communities and involve them in the work it does.
- 1.4 This means that the Council must ensure that adults, children, and young people are given opportunities to be involved in processes for decision making on issues that affect them. This means listening to what matters to them and taking their views seriously.
- 1.5 The Children and Young People's Plan includes a clear priority regarding HEARD 'engaging with children, young people and families' with a simple action focused on ensuring the full engagement of all service users in improving and shaping services, and in the commissioning of new services. Giving a voice and influence to children and young people in decision making demonstrates a clear commitment to them and acknowledges their right to shape their own future.
- 1.6 The Sefton Pledge ([Our Pledge \(sefton.gov.uk\)](https://sefton.gov.uk/our-pledge)) is our promise to cared for and care experienced young people in Sefton. The 10 promises are what children and young people said they wanted from the people who look after them whilst they are in our care. As Corporate Parents the Council agrees to do everything in its power to carry out these ten promises.

## 2. Equality Implications

- 2.1 The Equality Act 2010 says public authorities must comply with the public sector equality duty. In carrying out their functions, they need to have due regard to the need to achieve the objectives set out under s149 of the Equality Act 2010 to:
  - Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under this Act.
  - Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it.
  - Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The protected characteristics are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender Reassignment
- Marriage and Civil Partnership
- Pregnancy and Maternity
- Race
- Religion and Belief
- Sex
- Sexual Orientation

- 2.2 In Sefton, a motion was approved by Council, at its meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2023 to include Care Experience, as a protected characteristic. This decision is recognised in the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy.
- 2.3 Young people are a protected characteristic by age, but they may also have other protected characteristics too, for example they may also have a disability or are care experienced.
- 2.4 According to the Census 2021 there are 71, 404 children and young people aged 0 – 24. In Sefton there are also currently over 600 cared for children and over 2500 children and young people who have an Education, Health and Care plan.
- 2.5 The examples in section 3 below demonstrate different ways that children and young people with the protected characteristic of age and with other protected characteristics are engaged and heard.
- 2.6 Engaging children and young people will mean that we need to be flexible in our approach and to remove any barriers to involvement. Understanding the best ways that children and young people wish to engage with us and receive information will support this as will providing information in accessible formats suitable to their needs. Young people have also reported that the language used is also important, so that the information and messages are clear.
- 2.7 Some young people have told us that they don't have access to the internet and Wi-Fi at home and children and young people are already telling us of the preferred way that they would like to be engaged, whether that is online or face-to-face.

They have told us how they would like to receive information about mental health services, for example, who they would engage with if they had a problem with poverty and inequality, hate crime or if they didn't feel safe and how consultations should be presented (for example, a questionnaire or an easy read workbook). Continuing to ask children and young people about their preferred way of receiving information and being involved and making reasonable adjustments will help to ensure that we are hearing all voices.

- 2.8 The Youth Voice and Participation Toolkit (Appendix A), designed by the Sefton Young Advisors will also provide guidance to engaging children and young people in a meaningful way and the Sefton Strategic Youth Voice Network will be

coordinating the voice of children and young people and how it influences service development. The Network will also be looking at sharing good practice.

### **3. Ways Children and Young People are Heard**

3.1 Sefton benefits from a range of mechanisms to enable the voice of children and young people to be heard and these range from consultation/co-production activity to smaller groups to individual conversations.

3.2 The UK Youth Parliament (UKYP) is made up of Members of Youth Parliament (MYPs) from boroughs across the UK, aged 11-18 years of age.

The Metro Mayor's Advisory Group is a diverse group of 25 young people from right across the City Region which meets 6 times a year and serves as a crucial sounding board for the Metro Mayor. The Metro Mayor's office also ensure there are plenty development opportunities for members of the group to develop their skills.

The North West Youth Foria are meetings that take place across the North West where young people from different boroughs are supported by their local authorities to share the good work they are doing to support fellow young people. Representing Sefton as part of the Youth Foria, young people take part in workshops where they make sure the voices of minority groups are heard, including LGBTQ and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

3.3 [Sefton - Young Advisors](#), hosted by Sefton CVS, work in partnership with community leaders and decision makers to enable the voices of young people to be heard in community life.

3.4 Sefton Youth Making Better Opportunities with Leaders (SYMBOL) meetings are an opportunity for young people to meet and work collaboratively with key decision makers in Sefton. Co-ordinated by Sefton's Young Advisors, young people are involved in the planning and delivery of SYMBOL activity and attendees vote on the topics that are important to them. Being a member of SYMBOL means a young person can play an active role in their community, with a direct line of communication with key decision makers, such as councillors, Senior Managers from the Council and representatives from Health, Merseyside Police and more. There are SYMBOL meetings throughout the year at different locations around Sefton. An example of a SYMBOL report is available at Appendix B.

3.5 Schools Get Talking is a fortnightly online group for young people to talk about what matters to them and give their opinions on what things need to change. The group is co-ordinated by members of the SEND team and regularly meets with the Councils Chief Executive to raise issues about the views of young people, disability and education and actions are taken from the meeting.

3.6 The School Improvement Team, as part of pre inspection support, undertake Health Checks with Primary and Secondary schools which involves discussions with Head Teachers and Subject Leads about feedback from young people regarding their learning experience. The feedback forms part of a report on the quality of education and the team will agree next steps in terms of actions in response to the feedback and monitor implementation.

- 3.7 Schools have Designated Teachers who have the responsibility to promote the educational achievement of cared for children and a key element of their role is ensuring that children have a voice in setting targets that will promote academic and emotional wellbeing.
- 3.8 Career Connect undertake surveys on the views of young people regarding the service and agree actions in response to any feedback provided. This could be a change to way the service is delivered, or it could be an action in response to feedback about post.
- 3.9 The Council has a number of Participation Officers supporting 14 – 19 year olds, children and young people with SEND and cared for and care experienced children and young people. These officers work with and listen to children and young people encouraging participation in activities and groups. The Sefton@Work team ensures that young people are listened to and supported in making the right choices of next steps and work with all to provide the right courses.

There is a Participation Officer within Children's Social Care to support the involvement of Cared for and Care Experienced Children and Young People. Young People are provided with opportunities to have their views heard, and to shape the services they receive, influencing change at an operational and strategic level.

Opportunities for young people to be involved and have their voices heard include:

- **Cared For and Care Experienced Councils**

Members of our Cared For and Care Experienced Councils work alongside officers to support the improvement & development of services for all of our children and young people.

**Youth Ambassadors (11-15yrs):**

The Youth Ambassadors are a group of cared for young people aged 11-15yrs. The group meet every two weeks, via online and face-to-face meetings. The group help the Council to improve services for children and young people by sharing their own experiences of being cared for. Over the past year, the group have been involved in several projects including:

- Designing information for young people including Sefton Pledge, Children's Guides, and Young Person's Website.
- Working with the principal social worker to develop Practice Standards for Professionals and the Direct Work Toolkit.
- Working with other children's social care staff to develop National Minimum Standards for Foster Carers, Children's Complaints Procedure and Personal Education Plans.
- Interviews for senior managers



## **Making A Difference (MAD) Group (16+yrs)**

Our Making a Difference group is a well-established group, made up of Cared for and Care Experienced young People. The group meet every two weeks via online and face-to-face meetings.

Over the past year the group have been involved in several projects including:

- Developing Practice Standards for Professionals
- Working with Children's Commissioning to develop the placement strategy.
- Consultation on Sefton Local Offer and Finance Policy for young people 16+
- Designing Care Experienced Survey
- Delivering training to foster carers / social care staff / health practitioners
- Interviewing staff for positions within Sefton Council and health services.
- Group representatives are members of the Corporate Parenting Board

The groups meet regularly with managers and members of the Corporate Parenting Board to ensure their views are recognised at a senior level and have also met with the Commissioner and Chair of the Improvement Board.

The Cared For and Care Experienced Councils agreed 3 key priorities for 2023 which are: Cared For Reviews, children and young people's mental health, endings with professionals.

It is recognised that not all young people wish to be part of the councils and officers offer other ways in which children and young people can get involved, share their views and influence change. For example there is a quarterly participation newsletter which is sent to all cared for children and young people to update them on what is happening across the service and how they can get involved. Young people have been invited to take part in competitions to design a welcome card for new staff and to share their artwork around the theme '*what makes me happy*', which are displayed in Social Care offices. Young people are advised they can contact the Participation Officer directly to share their views.

The Participation Officer is part of several working groups to ensure the voice of children and young people is represented throughout Children's Social Care and the wider Council:

- Being Heard, Consulted, and Informed (Chair)
- Youth Voice Strategic Steering Group
- Sefton Social Work Academy Strategic Board
- Consultation and Engagement Panel
- Access to Resource Panel
- Every Child Matters Forum

The Participation Officer is working in collaboration with the Fostering Service, Virtual School, and external company – Dramatic Recovery, to offer drama sessions to children and young people. The sessions give young people who take part the opportunity to express their views through performance. Sessions have

been running since September 2022 with young people working towards a final performance to be showcased at the Annual Fostering conference. Young people have been given independence to create a piece of drama around the key issues that are important to them.

- 3.10 The Council has established the Caring Business Charter, with 54 partner organisations (at the time of writing) from the public and private sectors committed to providing employment, skills, training, apprenticeship, work experience, mentoring and other opportunities and support to care experienced young people across Sefton. Opportunities on offer range from taster days in certain businesses and sectors, to employment and apprenticeship opportunities.
- 3.11 The Caring Business Charter has been incorporated into the Council's Social Value Policy, and in turn into procurement processes across the organisation. While the Charter may provide direct access to employment vacancies and career opportunities with these organisations, each Charter signatory has a relationship manager engaging with the organisation to ensure that the opportunities on offer are shaped to suit the needs, interests, and skills of the specific young person.
- 3.12 When the term 'the child's voice' is used it not only refers to what children say directly, but rather to many ways that children communicate, including both verbal and nonverbal communication. It means more than seeking their views, which could just mean the child saying what they want, rather than really being involved in what happens. Working restoratively to listen and respond to the voices of children and young people is fundamental to front line-work that takes place every day, ensuring that children and young people are heard in decisions that affect their lives.
- 3.13 The Family Wellbeing Shadow Board aims to strengthen professional practice, services and ensure the voice of the child/young person is central to service improvement and development. The voice of the child/young person is fundamental within early help services as often decisions, policies, interventions facilitated will directly affect them.
- 3.14 In 2020, Sefton Council was awarded a £37.5m Town Deal for Southport, with only one single town receiving a larger Town Deal. This funding, along with further funding from Sefton Council and the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, will enable a range of capital projects that will be transformative for the town and its economy, particularly supporting economic diversification and resilience, and the retention of young talent in the town. The projects, and the strategy on which they and the Town Deal bid and Investment Plan are based, was developed through close collaboration, consultation and engagement with young people across the Town. More than 1,000 young people aged 7 to 16 participated in consultation exercises on the projects, helping to shape the strategy and the offer, particularly on the Marine Lake Events Centre project, a £73m project named by one of the children participating in the exercises above. This engagement is continuing via Southport schools and colleges at the time of writing, regarding not

only the projects themselves but the wider opportunities for engagement in the construction sector, for example. Moreover, a Shadow Board to the Southport Town Deal Board was established, and remains in place, enabling students to provide specific feedback on the draft content of the Town Deal Investment Plan, and key projects and play a continuing role in project development. The strength of this consultation and engagement exercise was recognised by Government as a key factor in securing a Town Deal of such size. The same approach is being undertaken regarding the future of Bootle town centre and will be progressed elsewhere in the borough.

#### 4. Children and Young People Influencing Change

- 4.1 There are many examples in Sefton where children and young people have been heard and influenced change.
- 4.2 As mentioned earlier in the report how this is takes many forms, Appendix C provides some examples of how the Family Wellbeing Shadow Board have influenced change.
- 4.3 In August 2022 two activity days for cared for and care experienced young people were delivered at Crosby Lakeside Activity Centre. Staff and young people were encouraged to come along and spend the day on the lake, building relationships, trying new activities, and having fun. Feedback from both staff and young people was extremely positive and another three sessions in August 2023 have been arranged. Officers have also used our learning from these sessions to deliver a water sports activity day for children with complex needs, and their families.

Some of the feedback received included:

##### Staff:

*"It was a really great day for all and enabled staff and children an opportunity to take part in fun activities together. Staff were able to appreciate the children's achievements during the different activities, which promoted their self-confidence, self-esteem and team building skills!"*

*"It was a great day for both the young people and the workers, it was a brilliant way of building trust and strengthening a strong positive working relationship with the young people we are working with".*

*"I am so grateful for havina the opportunity to spend the day with youna people. Such fun activities and memories made. The best part, was seeing the huge smiles on everyone's faces especially all the amazing young people there."*

##### Young People:

*"I liked meeting new people and trying new things like kayaking".*

*"It was good to spend the day with my social worker – they are fun!"*

*"I liked being out on the lake and doing archery and climbing".*

4.4 Each year cared for children and young people tell us how we are doing against the 10 promises outlined in the Sefton Pledge. There are two surveys – one for 5-9 yrs, and another for 10+yrs. The surveys were sent to all cared for children and young people in July 2022, with closing date of 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2022.

Young people aged 10+yrs were also given the opportunity to complete the survey online via *Your Sefton, Your Say*. The first ten young people to respond received a shopping voucher and all young people who provided feedback were entered into a prize draw to win a donated Samsung Galaxy tablet.

Responses in 2022 increased compared to previous years:

5-9yrs: 30% (compared to 14% in 2021).  
10+yrs: 18% (compared to 10% in 2021)

The survey results are measured against previous years. Feedback has remained consistent over the past three years – where we are doing well, we are continuing to do so, however this also means we have seen little improvement in the areas that scored the lowest.

Responses from the survey were collated and a report was presented to the Corporate Parenting Board. Areas identified for improvement were sent to the Chairs of the five working groups to include in their action plans. The working groups include:

- Safe and Stable Homes
- Health and wellbeing
- Being Heard, consulted, and informed.
- Transitions and preparation for independent living
- Raising Aspirations

The Participation Officer informed young people of the survey results and will follow this up with our plan to address the issues raised within the survey.

4.5 Appendix D provides a number of case studies where children and young people have been heard and influenced change.

4.6 Council is asked to

- reaffirm its commitment to listening to the voices of children, young people and their families in the development of Council and partnership strategies.
- invite members of SYMBOL to attend and speak at a future Council meeting on a subject that is important to them.