

STRATEGY
FOR
YOUTH PARTICIPATION

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Aim of this Strategy

To increase the breadth and improve the quality of work to involve young people aged 11-19 in the key decisions which affect their lives

Consultation

This strategy was produced by Darlington Youth Service's Participation Team, and informed by colleagues from the statutory and voluntary sectors and young people from:

- **Darlington Youth Assembly (DYA)**
- **North East Regional Youth Assembly (NERYA)**
- **Branksome Youth Club**
- **Bishopton Youth Club**
- **Skerne Park Youth Club**
- **Haughton Youth Club**
- **Firthmoor Youth Club**
- **Hummersknot Chill Out Group**
- **Going Extreme**

The next stage is to carry out further dialogue with other young peoples groups, including the voluntary sector and:

- Young people 11-19 years
- Statutory and Voluntary Sector Organisations
- Darlington Partnership
- Darlington Borough Council (Members; Chief Executive; Policy Unit; Children's Services)

Throughout this process specific efforts have and will be made to access traditionally 'hard to reach' groups of young people.

Promoting Young Peoples Involvement

A Strategy for Youth Participation in Darlington

Participation as recognised in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child:

Article 12 (1): States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

Article 13 (1): The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

SECTION ONE: The Case for Participation:

Young people's participation in key decisions that affect their lives is a right accepted in the UK by ratification of Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Participation by young people does result in tangible benefits for themselves, for organisations and for society. Meaningful participation is a process, which requires developing new youth-adult relationships rooted in mutual trust and respect and engaging in real dialogue.

Undertaking meaningful and sustainable participation requires organisations to change. This change is about the whole ethos and culture of the organisation and needs to happen within senior management, as well as within frontline staff, and across policy and practice. It is about developing new ways of working with young people. Developing the infrastructure and building organisational capacity needs dedicated commitment, sufficient staff support and an undertaking to adopt an organisational learning approach: all of which are more likely where there are champions of youth participation.

Benefits

Young people benefit by being involved. It develops skills such as communication, negotiation and teamwork that are useful life-skills. It engenders a sense of responsibility for oneself and others. Most importantly it can raise self-esteem, however, badly organized or tokenistic participation is worse than none at all and leaves young people feeling disillusioned and under valued.

Organisations benefit from young people's participation. The private sector has long realised that the best way of getting services right is to consult with the customer. Unfortunately it has only been recent for public services to recognise young people as customers and participation is still not always practiced.

There are now many statutory requirements for organisations to involve children and young people:

- Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)
- Children Act 1989
- Health and Social Care Act 2001
- Modernising Local Government
- Education Act 2002
- Learning to Listen Core Principles (CYPU, 2001)
- Transforming Youth Work 2003
- Children's Act 2004 (Every Child Matters)
- Children's National Service Framework 2005
- Youth Matters 2005

Why Participation is Important

“What is the point of developing policy for children, policy to solve really critical issues, like bullying and anti-social behaviour, without finding out what children and young people think about it?”

What is the point of building state-of-the-art new facilities for young people in local communities, like leisure facilities and youth clubs, if they don't appeal to young people and they don't use them?

And what is the point of developing a care plan for a bereaved child - without asking the child what their needs might be?”

Beverley Hughes, Championing Children: Speech, 16 November 2005

What Makes for Successful Participation?

Young people are not a homogenous group. Do not expect that they will all agree with each other.

Participation requires a culture shift in adults and in organisations. Relinquish some power and treat young people as partners.

Young people lead different lives from adults. Participation events need to fit around the often-busy schedules of young people.

Value young people's contributions. Give feedback, acknowledge and accredit contributions, consider paying out of pocket expenses and most importantly thank them.

Being inclusive. Different methods will be needed and will work best with different groups; access to events/ opportunities/ materials; ensuring that as wide a range of young people as possible are able to be actively involved.

Promoting Dialogue

Dialogue is an interactive, ongoing process, not a one off event. A distinction needs to be made between 'consultation' where powerful people consult the powerless, and 'dialogue' where young people are seen as partners with a valid contribution to make to the design and delivery of services.

Having conversations with young people enables them to play an active role in their relationships with adults. Both have something to offer and learn from each other; neither has all the answers. The best way for young people to communicate their needs and ideas and for adults to respond appropriately is through positive dialogue:

- Listening to each other
- Learning from each other
- Attempting to understand others' perspectives
- Responding constructively to each other
- Adults being open and up front about what they can offer.

Dialogue should not be seen as an end in itself, dialogue must lead to change. Having invited young people to comment on how a service is provided we need to make sure young people are then able to influence it's development.

How Participation Contributes to Citizenship and Social Inclusion:

- Providing inclusive practice that draws in those often excluded (e.g. young children, carers, asylum seekers and disabled young people).
- Meets UNCRC expectations for the right to participate in decisions affecting their lives. Help ensure the right to be treated with respect, to be safe and protected from harm.
- Empowers through being included. Developing skills and knowledge to get heard and deeper self-belief in ability to create change.
- Enhances citizenship and political education, including knowledge of children's rights, structures, services, etc.
- Increases independence and responsibility for actions.
- Increases ownership and care for services.
- Develops more positive community relationships between young people, peers and adults.
- Improves sense of community and belonging.

SECTION TWO: A Model for Youth Involvement in Darlington

YOUNG PEOPLE – OUR FUTURE:

Active citizenship – Enhancing the engagement of children and young people

The overall vision of our LAA recognises the need to broaden horizons for young people and increase the range of opportunities that there are to build confidence and self-esteem.

In a small authority, it is essential that we do not duplicate effort and therefore we intend to develop a joined up approach to consultation and engagement of children and young people through the restructured youth service

Key action3:

To develop a framework for consultation and involvement which builds community intelligence on need, provision and outcomes. It is envisaged that this will have three strands:

- Service specific: That individual services, agencies and providers sign up to a model of young people's active involvement to ensure that this involvement permeates all aspects of that service.
- Borough wide: The creation of mechanisms and a body which means that the voice of young people is able to be articulated and that it is present at the key over-arching decision-making bodies within the borough.
- Inter-agency support: This would entail representatives from key delivery agencies across the borough coming together to sign up to a model of youth participation as outlined and to develop a youth participation strategy to facilitate this.

Young People – Our Future: A second phase Local Area Agreement. Darlington Partnership & Darlington Borough Council: January 2006

Vision

The vision for Youth Participation in Darlington is to ensure that:

- The voice of young people is heard.
- Young people help shape services.
- The voices of more marginalized groups of young people are able to be articulated.
- Service providers will be able to listen to young people in a co-ordinated way.
- Young people will be able to evaluate and monitor service delivery.
- That there are clear routes for all young people to contribute to debate and project development.

So how can this all be achieved in a practical way here in Darlington?

We need to be inclusive, **we need to adopt the basic principle that any young people can and will be actively encouraged to become involved.** To achieve this we need to make sure that:

- All barriers are removed to enable inclusion, working with all young people including underrepresented groups.
- Young peoples capacity to enter into meaningful dialogue with key adults is strengthened.
- We need to build the capacity of key adults from both the volunteer and statutory sector to enter into meaningful dialogue with young people.

- Development of a Youth Participation Network to create a cohesive approach within the borough, involving young people from statutory and voluntary sector groups that promote youth participation.
- Develop mechanisms with young people to enable them to evaluate and monitor changes that have taken place.

The Three Tier Model

- **Tier 1:** Young people aged 11-19 years who live in the Borough and up to 25 years for young people with special needs. As there does not appear to be an equivalent strategy to develop a consultation processes with children under 11 years, there is an opportunity for the Children's Fund Team to develop an adapted 5-11 years model which could sit alongside this strategy. At time of writing it is anticipated that colleagues in Early Years Service (Children's Services) and Children's Fund will collaborate to formulate a participation strategy for children aged 5-11. This will be developed in conjunction with Youth Service staff to enable as much consistency and cohesion as possible.
- **Tier 2:** Existing groups of young people, both within the statutory and voluntary sector, that promote youth participation, for example School Councils, Youth Forums, Connexions Shadow Board, Investing in Children, Children's Fund, Youth Forums, Uniformed Organisations, Sport Groups etc. These groups will form the Youth Participation Network. The youth service's Youth Participation Team, via a regular bulletin and an annual conference, will facilitate communication between the independent groups of the Youth Participation Network. Tier 2 groups will be encouraged and supported to find out and take forward issues that are important to young people in Tier 1.
- **Tier 3:** The formation of a Youth Voice & Action Group that will bring together elected representatives from Tier 2 and the Member, and Deputy Member, of Youth Parliament for Darlington. The Youth Voice & Action Group will have a direct link to the **Children & Young Persons Strategic Partnership** (CYPSP) and the **Local Strategic Partnership** (LSP) with a relationship based around dialogue that results in real change that young people recognise. It is anticipated that as the CYPSP develops and Children's Trust arrangements are confirmed, that a framework for coordinated consultation will be developed and agreed and that the role of the Voice and Action group will be central to this framework (and subject to agreement this could include a seat on the CYPSP for the town's MYP). The Youth Voice & Action Group will have links with regional and national participation groups, for example North-East Regional Youth Assembly, UKYP, British Youth Council etc.

Diagram for Youth Participation

Key principle:

Any young person in Tier 1 should be able to become actively involved in Tier 2 and have two-way dialogue with Tier 3.

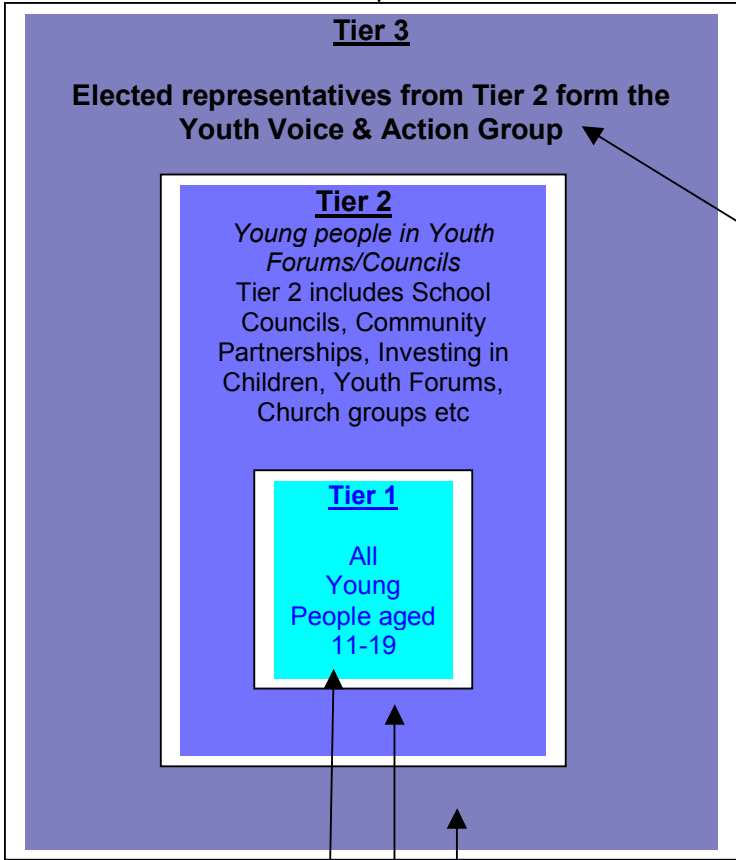
The Participation Strategy has 3 core elements:

- mechanisms for the direct participation of young people
- cross-professional support and development
- individual service/department action.

Individual Services/Departments

Commitment to young people's participation in the design and delivery of services (for example):

- create a named Participation Contact/lead
- individual service/dept mapping
- develop a service specific action plan
- link to/utilise the Adult Support Group



Key decision making organisations

- DBC
- Children's Trust
- PCT
- Darlington Partnership
- VCS
- GONE

Adult Co-ordinating & Support Group

- ⇒ Development of Youth Participation Strategy
- ⇒ Develop service specific work
- ⇒ Support & underpin the Youth Voice & Influence Group
- ⇒ Participate in support, sharing, training and development

Linking into other consultation:

The Three Tier Model will provide a structure for policy makers to find out what young people expect and think about critical issues such as education, transport, leisure facilities etc, before decisions are made.

Member for Youth Parliament & Deputy MYP
Elected annually.

November: Application of interest
Nov – February: Candidates canvassing
February: Election

Ballot overseen by Democratic Services

Role of the Youth Service

The Youth Service will work to ensure young people's participation permeates all levels & builds on good practice through:-

- Peer Inspection
- Young people & Programme Planning
- Recruitment & Selection
- Peer Education
- Challenge to individual services to meaningfully engage young people in decision-making.
- Financial & worker support to Member of Youth Parliament & Deputy MYP
- Promotion & support to young people on Regional & National Organisations
 - NE Regional Youth Assembly
 - British Youth Council
 - UK Youth Parliament

Youth Service Involvement in the Three Tier Model

Tier 1: All Young People

- E-Vibe & VibeVoice
- Youth service will support young people in Tier 2 to create structures for identifying Tier 1 issues
- Consultation in schools
- A Senior Youth Worker with responsibility for increasing involvement of young people from marginalised groups
- Community-based Youth Workers

Tier 2: Local Youth Groups

- Support and training for young people
- Support & training for adult groups to effectively engage with young people
- Support for Tier 2 groups to hold elections for Tier 3 representatives
- TextVibe

Tier 3: Youth Voice & Action Group

- Support & training for young people
- Ensure effective dialogue with decision making organisations

Darlington Youth Service is committed to supporting real dialogue between young people and agencies involved in planning services. Expansion within the Youth Service has led to increased worker capacity and an opportunity to develop innovative ways of delivering real participation by young people. To do this the Youth Service will support partners both within the statutory and voluntary sector to build their own capacity to enter into meaningful dialogue with young people.

Involvement Team

A team of two youth officers and a youth worker, who will work with young people and adults to promote, develop, deliver and support youth participation in Darlington (Tier 1, 2 & 3)

Innovative Projects Team

- Senior Youth Worker to involve under-represented groups (Tier 1&2)
- Senior Youth Worker to develop innovative ways of working with young people on issues that are important to them (Tier 1,2 & 3)
- *E-VIBE*: A youth website where any young person can make contact and make known their views on issues important to them. Young people were involved in the development of the site and a young person has been employed to continue development (Tier 1, 2 & 3)
- *TEXT VIBE*: A two-way text message service (Tier 1,2 & 3)

Training and Accreditation:

The youth service has training and accreditation routes for young people and adults. Accreditation of a young person's time in participation/involvement projects is an important aspect of a reward and recognition structure (Tier 1, 2 & 3).

Quality Assurance Framework

The youth service has a robust Quality Assurance (QA) framework that has specific areas focusing on Participation & young people's involvement in programme planning, delivery and evaluation. The QA Framework has assessment criteria to evaluate youth work practice and resources. A team of trained young people & a Youth Manager uses the QA Framework, with responsibility for QA and curriculum. (Tier 2 & 3).

Standard one: Evidence of listening

- Does it evidence how young people have been listened to?

Standard two: Evidence of involvement in planning

- Does it evidence how young people have been involved in the whole process and how that involvement will be sustained?

Standard three: Evidence of responding

- Does it evidence how plans have taken into account what the young people have said?

Standard four: Evidence of change

- Does it demonstrate what changes have resulted as a result of involving young people?

The Process

- Within the **statutory youth service**, the Participation Team will work alongside the Training and Accreditation Team and young people from the Voice & Action Group (Tier 3) to develop accredited training courses that will build individuals capacity to enter into dialogue with key adults. At activity/project level (Tier 1) it will result in young people being more able to work in partnership with staff to develop their programme and play an active role in the running and development of the activity/project. Young people will also be able to play a greater role within there own community.

Linking in with the Peer Inspection Team, to ensure quality assurance, regular inspection of all youth service provision will take place, the inspection criteria will set minimum standards in relation to young people participation.

- Within the **voluntary and community** sector youth service staff will offer accredited training and support for volunteers so adults can build their own and young peoples capacity. Actively encouraging volunteering and the development of a Tier 2 young peoples group will result in participation for all
- Within the **local authority** the youth service can offer support to other services to build their own capacity to enter into dialogue with young people thus enabling the involvement of young people in the development of service at service delivery level. Working with senior officers and elected members, youth service staff will develop their links with young people though Tiers 1,2 & 3. At local level elected members could, for example, work with young people from Tier 2 to develop junior ward surgeries.

- **From Tier 2 to Tier 3.** All Tier 2 groups are entitled to nominate two representatives to attend the Voice and Action Group (Tier 3) meetings. The young people who form the Voice and Action Group will meet monthly and raise issues or ideas from Tier 1 & 2 groups or individual young people. The Voice and Action Group will have the power to ask appropriate senior office to attend meetings and enter into meaningful dialogue. Senior officers and elected members will be able to ask the young people to carry out research with their peers on any issues.
- **Tier 3 young peoples posts:** The youth service will employ young people aged 13-19 on a part time session base, to assist in facilitating at Tiers 1 though to 3. Their duties will include working alongside youth service staff to enable all the Tiers to be effective; linking in with ether elected members, community partnerships, statutory and voluntary services to represent the voice of young people.
- **Darlington's Member and Deputy Member of UK Youth Parliament** will be expected to attend the Voice and Action Group meeting and will carry forward issues both local and nationally. This will result in greater accountability and credibility for the youth members of parliament.

Funding & Contributing to Communities

Darlington Youth Service will, in partnership with young people who are elected members of the Youth Voice and Action Group (Tier 3), develop a scheme that will allow young people themselves, to assess funding applications from other young people and youth groups. The idea is not new; many areas already run similar schemes throughout the North East where young people are responsible for administering funding to applicants.

A delegated budget would give young people ownership of funding and allow them to take a more responsible and meaningful role. This added responsibility would contribute to young peoples development in management, finance and raising their awareness of other youth groups in the borough of Darlington.

The introduction of the Youth Opportunity Fund (YOF) and the Youth Capital Fund (YCF) gives an immediate ability to turn ideas and opinions into action. By asking the Voice and Action Group to take the lead on the development of these funds within the Borough, it further profiles, strengthens and legitimizes the Group (and the Youth Participation Model and Strategy).

A key element of youth work is to work with young people on decision making and having a dedicated budget would not only contribute to developing better and needed projects, but also the development of young people and their personal skills. It would allow them to make a positive contribution to their local community and the larger community of Darlington Borough. The developing Government guidance on the Funds stresses the need for local mechanisms and processes to target resources on more hard to reach young people and we will establish mechanisms and structures to enable this to happen in Darlington.

Rewards and Recognition

Young peoples involvement is key to developing and delivering responsive services. There is a wide range of ways in which people can be involved from responding to a consultation exercise to being a representative on a committee or working group.

For effective involvement young people need to feel supported and their contribution to be valued. There are many ways to do this; being thanked, receiving acknowledgement, accreditation, seeing improvements made as a result and being offered reimbursement for any expenses incurred. Payment is also an option through vouchers and employment on a session basis. Young people become involved in participation in different ways. For example:

- By joining committees alongside professionals.
- Through groups (such as focus groups, forums, partnerships)
- By undertaking training
- In research projects.
- Volunteering
- On staff recruitment panels or training.

Incentives and Rewards Defined

Incentive	Something that encourages effort or action	Activities, food, transport, appropriate venue, familiar setting, local, residential experience, having a voice, build confidence, new skills, benefits other young people, new friends, influence decisions, fun, freebies and all of the below if you are aware you are going to receive it.
Recognition	The way in which we demonstrate that young people's participation is valued and appreciated	Early feedback on the impact of participation, thank you letters, providing references, inclusion in reports, being quoted in publications, speeches or national/local media, photographs published, giving certificates, nominations for awards, name badges for young people on youth boards, business cards.
Reward	Something tangible that is of value to young people	Vouchers (e.g. book, music, mobile phone) free text messages, accreditation, certificates, access to other opportunities, meals out, remuneration.
Remuneration	Payment received by a young person in return for a service	Employment contracts (full/part time, sessional).

Performance Targets and Outcomes:

Performance target one/ 06-07	Number of young people involved in Voice & Action Group (Tier 3)	30
Performance target two/ 06-07	Number of groups supported in Youth Participation Network (Tier 2)	10
Proposed Performance target three 06-07	% of young people in Tiers 2 and 3 who feel that their participation has made a difference	75%

Outcomes:

1. Adoption of Hear by Right Standards
2. Development of 'impact' measures
3. Production of annual report to demonstrate impact of young people's participation on services
4. Full allocation of Youth Opportunity Fund and Youth Capital Fund is utilised

Action Plan

Key Action	Milestone	Timescale	Outcome
Establish Youth Participation Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Appoint to key posts within team ➤ Establish roles & areas of responsibilities 	December 05	Youth Participation Team, located in youth service, supports development & ongoing growth of opportunities for young people to be partners in the decision making processes that affect their lives.
Develop & strengthen youth participation across Darlington Borough by working with young people to develop a youth participation model.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Work with young people from a range of participation groups ➤ Develop a draft model 	February 06	Draft Youth Participation Strategy for Darlington incorporates the views of young people.
Communicate on draft youth participation strategy with young people, voluntary sector groups, key agencies & decision-making individuals/groups. The process will include a discussions on reward & recognition protocol.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Carry out a mapping exercise of youth participation & involvement groups ➤ Hold a series of awareness events to involve:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Young people currently involved in participation groups identified in mapping exercise ▪ Young people 11-19 years within the borough ▪ Statutory & Voluntary Sector ▪ Darlington Partnership ▪ DBC (Members, Chief Executive, Policy Unit, Children's Services) 	<p>March 06</p> <p>April-May 06</p>	Youth Participation Strategy for Darlington incorporates the views of wider community and contains a clear reward and recognition protocol.
Communicate & get sign up to Youth Participation Strategy by young people & key agencies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Launch of Youth Participation Strategy 	May 06	Youth Participation Strategy is accepted as a working model and recognised by young people.
Communicate & get sign up to Youth Participation Strategy from Elected Members and Senior Officers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Strategy and report to Corporate Management Team ➤ Strategy and report to Cabinet ➤ Strategy and report to LSP 	<p>May 06</p> <p>June 06</p> <p>Tbc</p>	Youth Participation Strategy is accepted as a working model cross Council and by partners agencies cross-Borough.
Build capacity in statutory & voluntary sector to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Youth Participation Team give support to statutory & voluntary sector to enable active involvement of 	Ongoing	Youth Participation Strategy is fully implemented in Darlington.

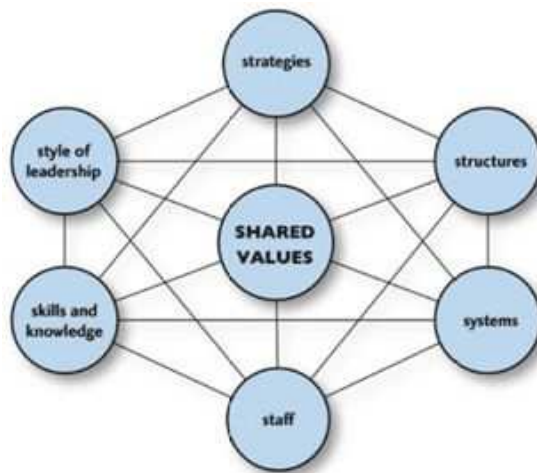
implement the youth participation strategy.	young people <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Voluntary organisations▪ Schools▪ DBC Departments▪ Elected members		
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Encourage and support organisations to adopt Hear by Right Standards Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Identify member of youth participation team who will take lead role on Hear by Right ➤ Develop a young person led assessment group ➤ Contact organisations and encourage involvement ➤ Programme an assessment/ inspection timetable 	<p>April 06</p> <p>July 06</p> <p>September 06</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	Clear standards of youth participation that can be assessed and acknowledged.
Development of a youth participation network (Tier 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Establish communication links between Tier 2 groups via evibe and events 	July 06	Clear lines of communication between Tier 2 groups.
From Tier 2 the formation of Tier 3 Youth Voice & Action Group supported by an adult Co-ordination Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Elections in Tier 2 groups for representatives on the Youth Voice & Action Group ➤ Invitations to key organisations for representatives on adult Co-ordination Group ➤ Develop young person led funding assessment group 	<p>September 06</p> <p>September 06</p> <p>October 06</p>	Youth Voice and Action Group has a clear democratic process and support from an adult group committed to youth voice. Youth Voice & Action Group become conduit for funding.
Develop & communicate initiatives/events that involve Tier 1 YP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Develop communication routes targeting Tier 1 (TextVibe, Vibe, local media) ➤ Stage an annual event that targets young people across the borough 	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Local Democracy Week (October)</p>	<p>All young people in Darlington have a mechanism for giving input to decisions that affect them.</p> <p>Young people's participation is highly profiled within the Borough.</p>
Review Youth Participation Strategy on an annual basis with young people & Youth Participation Network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Event to review the strategy and plan future action ➤ Develop a year on year plan with new initiatives to strengthen young peoples participation 	Local Democracy Week (October)	Strategy continues to be built on views of young people.

Appendix 1

HEAR BY RIGHT is a standards framework for organisations across the statutory and voluntary sectors to assess and improve practice and policy on the active involvement of children and young people.

The standards framework in Hear by Right is based on the Seven S model of organisational change: Shared values; Strategy; Structures; Systems; Staff; Skills and knowledge and Style of leadership. It relies on self-assessment, divided into three levels of 'emerging', 'established' and 'advanced', with each level building on the last. *This ensures that young people's involvement is built in and not just bolted on.*



Shared Values

Is there a strong commitment to involving young people at the heart of the organisation's core values?

Strategy

Does the strategy have the backing of those with the power to deliver and of the young people who are meant to benefit?

Structure

What structures, approaches will best serve the interests of all involved, particularly excluded young people?

Systems

What systems and procedures are needed to ensure participation is conducted safely and in a sound manner?

Staff, Members and Officers

How do you make sure Staff, Elected Members and Officers really do support the active involvement of children and young people?

Skills and Knowledge

How can adults be supported to listen and learn from young people?

Style of Leadership

How will the organisation demonstrate to young people that it is serious about their involvement?

Appendix 2

Youth Voice & Action Group (The name to be ratified by Young People)

If the group is to be inclusive the young people need to adopt the terms of reference as a draft, once the group are more developed and active, the young people involved need to ratify the terms of reference, it would seem sensible for this to happen 1 year after the 1st meeting.

Terms of Reference Draft

To develop Darlington Borough Councils approach to include Young People in its work so that Young People have the freedom and flexibility to develop their own agendas.

To develop the Youth Voice & Action Group to carry forward their own agenda.

To enable young people to contribute to making Darlington a better place to live, learn and play in.

To make sure that arrangements are in place to ensure as many Young People's groups, as possible are involved in the committee and receive service appropriate to their needs.

To work in partnership with other young people groups.

To inform Young People about the issues relating to changes and developments both within Darlington Borough Council, and at a Regional and National level.

Membership is open to any young person who lives in the Borough of Darlington aged 11-19 (up to 25 with special needs).

The Group will act as a commissioning group when requested to seek views and options as and when necessary.

The Group to invite relevant Senior Officers to meetings as required/appropriate.

The Group will have a direct link to, and report to, CYPSP/Children's Trust Board

The meeting to be chaired by a group member.

If people are unable to attend a meeting they should send apologies (e.g. ring or text the youth service office)

(on determining numbers of young people in the Group a statement on being quorate will be added)

GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND STANDARDS:

Time, commitment, planning, resources, skills and an adherence to broad principles and standards are factors that will distinguish superficial exercises from meaningful participation. Regardless of the actual mechanism used to consult or involve young people, it is important to consider whether the following principles and standards can be met.

Genuine Intentions: If consultation is seeking to affirm a decision that has already been made, or if there is no real intention to give consideration to the opinions of young people, do not consult.

Organisational support: An essential starting point is to ensure organisational commitment to the principles of inclusivity, and to the proposed mechanisms for supporting youth involvement. Whilst the actual work may be delegated to one person, coherent and sustainable involvement is only likely to be achieved where there is understanding and support at all levels of the organisation. The commitment should be reflected within the organisation's communication, consultation and promotional strategies, integrated within the organisation's planning cycles, and agreed by the key decision or policy makers.

Vision: Be crystal clear about what the organisation wants to achieve in terms of consultation or involvement. Agree on the immediate boundaries for such involvement, and ensure these boundaries are clearly related to the young participants. However, remember that too much structural planning without reference to potential participants can lead to rigid or inappropriate mechanisms. Where possible allow for flexibility within chosen structures, as approaches must be responsive to participants' needs.

Versatility: Don't rely on only one mechanism for dialogue with young people. The perfect approach to eliciting the views of, and engaging with, young people does not exist and there are always trade-offs in fundamental issues such as quality, quantity, coverage and representation. There is particular danger in over-focusing on the development of structures that provide intensive opportunities for a small number of young people. While these serve many valid purposes, they should not be used as a substitute for wider consultations. Likewise there is a danger in a single-issue approach, which fails to recognise the complexity of multi-faceted situations. To this end a variety of approaches should be used and constantly evaluated.

Timing: Always ensure that sufficient time is allocated for initial planning stages. For instance the need for youth participation is often identified at the end of a process of public consultation when the absence of young participants is noticed – subsequently youth events tend to be 'tagged on' with inadequate time for thorough planning. Similarly, if long term youth shadow or parallel groups are to be established, there should be synchronicity with the adult groups which they are shadowing, rather than creation of shadow groups as an afterthought.

Resources: Establishing involvement schemes or consultative events requires proper Resourcing, not only in terms of time, staff and finances, but also in terms of staff training, and follow through work. Organisers of youth-involvement schemes consistently comment that they had under-estimated the time commitment required, and suggest that youth involvement takes longer than equivalent adult-oriented initiatives. Many organisations also under-estimate the amount of funding required, particularly in long-term schemes where residential or payment of external facilitators may be required. It is not however necessary to develop extravagant schemes to sustain young people's interest or to 'buy compliance'. Participants' motivation should be based on recognition of their contribution rather than on the expectation of lavish treatment.

Strategic impact: Examine the long-term implications rather than viewing participation as a one-off exercise. There may be repercussions for service delivery, charter standards, re-thinking the role of consultation within the organisation, staff training, the development of partnerships, as well as for the systems of decision-making and resource allocation. The act of obtaining information is not an end in itself, but is a trigger within the planning and implementation cycles.

Inclusion: It is not overly difficult to recruit young people or to organise participation within events. However planners need to carefully analyse whether their recruitment measures have been inclusive, and be particularly mindful about involving young people who are not attached to identified groups.

Equality: Remember that while young people as a whole generally have insufficient opportunities to participate, there are many groupings who are further excluded, for example on the basis of poverty, race, gender, disability, etc. When recruiting participants there is a need to acknowledge that young people are not a homogeneous group but will have differing starting points and varying needs. Hence any involvement mechanism must demonstrate a strong commitment to equal opportunities and anti-discriminatory practices. This may necessitate employing a variety of different approaches to ensure full representation.

Trust: It is fairly easy to 'go through the motions' to elicit some form of comment or opinion from young people. However the depth of information and opinion which young people offer will be dependent on the relationship they have with those persons seeking the information. For example young people must be assured of confidentiality, of being taken seriously, of being valued and of being respected. Without the foundation of trust any form of dialogue is likely to yield superficial data.

Capacity building: Youth involvement usually requires additional time to be spent in the preparation stages and there is a need to assess what knowledge and skills are required by individuals to enable their full participation. This does not simply refer to the provision of information, but also to a variety of exercises and group work to equip young people with the skills and confidence to participate. Young people with little prior experience of expressing their views in an open forum will invariably require a higher intensity of capacity building or preparatory work. In terms of delivering this, consider establishing partnerships with groups who work with young people, and who can offer advice and practical support in terms of good group work practice. Capacity building may also be required among staff who will be interfacing with young people, as it is critical that adults are able to adopt an affirmative and person-centred approach when communicating with young people.

Responsiveness: It is also essential to regard involvement as a two-way relationship in which there is mutual gain. Motivation will quickly wane if young people feel they are not receiving recognition from their involvement. Hence it is important to ask participants about their expectations, and to try to relate the initiative to these expectations as far as possible. Always report back to participants (as promptly as possible) explaining what their contribution achieved.

Welfare: If any participants are minors, and/or if there is any need for an overnight stay, it is essential to ensure personal safety, and to follow standards of practice such as obtaining parental consent. In some instances vetting of staff who have 'substantial access' to young people will also be necessary. Guidelines on child protection are available and every aspect of any event or involvement scheme should be considered in terms of the personal welfare of participants. This should extend not only to the contact time spent with young people, but also to their safety in travelling to venues, and possible disruption to their school work.