

# **APPENDIX 3**

## **Strategy for ensuring the participation of children and young people for the CYPSP**

### **The Participation Network (May 2011)**

## Background

The CYPSP was formally established in January 2011. It is a cross-sectoral group consisting of the leadership of all key agencies who have responsibility for improving outcomes for all children and young people in NI. Membership includes health, social services, education, local government, youth justice, probation, policing, housing, urban renewal, alongside representatives from the voluntary and community sector.

The purpose of the CYPSP is to lead integrated planning and commissioning of support and services aimed at improving the lives of children and young people throughout NI.

The partnership is committed to ensuring that children and young people participate as active partners at all stages and levels of our planning processes.

While the partnership is new, integrated planning of services for children and young people has been taking place in NI for many years. That work was underpinned by the UNCRC and particular emphasis was placed on the need to ensure the involvement of children and young people. Consequently, a number of mechanisms for engaging children and young people in planning processes have been developed and are on-going. Many of the agencies involved in the CYPSP have pioneered initiatives aimed at supporting children's voices and have a long history of promoting and facilitating participation. We will be depending on the sharing of that learning and expertise as we build upon that legacy and implement this strategy.

We need to ensure that participative work is further developed, coordinated and standardised across the partnership. To this end, we have engaged with the Participation Network to advise us on the development and delivery of our participation strategy.

The Participation Network was established in 2007 and funded by OFMDFM to:

*"Increase the effectiveness of the NI Public Sector in engaging children and young people directly in decision-making".*

Since then, the Participation Network, a project of Children in NI (CiNI), has supported Government Departments, local Government and Public bodies to engage with children and young people, through the provision of free training, consultancy and signposting services.

The Participation Network has recently received renewed funding for 3 years to provide the public sector with expert support, advice and technical assistance in relation to directly engaging children and young people in public decision-making.

## Participation Strategy

### Aim

To ensure that the CYPSP engages with the children and young people who will be affected by our decisions; that children and young people will be active participants in the planning of services and that their experiences, views and ideas help inform the planning process.

### Standards

Activity undertaken in relation to this strategy will be underpinned by the “Ask First” standards, developed by the Participation Network and endorsed by the OFMDFM and HSCB. The standards will also serve as a means of measuring our progress towards ensuring the meaningful involvement of children and young people in the ongoing process of developing outcomes, indicators and services.

#### Standard 1: **Appropriate methods**

**Children and young people will be engaged in a variety of ways, based on what is best suited to their age and level of development/maturity. In particular, play based methodologies will be developed for involving younger children.**

It is clear that there is no “one size fits all” model of participation. We will need to develop a range of ways of engaging with children and young

people and draw upon the expertise of members of the partnership who have direct contact with children and young people. Training and action planning workshops can build the capacity of those agencies / personnel who are less familiar with participation.

The methods we adopt should be creative and enjoyable for those involved. It is rarely appropriate or effective to simply have children and young people sitting on adult forums. Where adults and children and young people form groups to work together the methodology needs to be adapted to suit the younger members and attention needs to be paid to power imbalances.

Methods might include focus groups on particular issues, one-off workshops with locality based groups, play based activities with younger children, building an on-going process with theme based groups (e.g. Disability and Transition) or large scale surveys via social networking sites (e.g. Facebook). Methods will also be dictated by the purpose of the engagement e.g. needs assessment, ongoing contribution to the planning process, reviewing the impact of services etc.

## **Standard 2: Support**

**Children and young people will be provided with the support needed to engage effectively in the decision making process.**

Children and young people who are being asked to give their views, share their experiences, identify their needs or contribute their ideas should be adequately prepared and supported to do so. Providing such support (e.g. a preparatory workshop to help them get their thoughts together before a consultation, or going through the agenda prior to a planning meeting) helps to develop skills and ensures that the engagement is effective and satisfying for all involved. Support is particularly important on occasions when children and young people are being asked to share or reflect upon sensitive issues or experiences. Partnership member agencies who undertake direct work with children and young people will have an important role to play in providing such support. It will also be important to

connect with those organisations that have been set up specifically to support the participation of children and young people

### **Standard 3: Knowledge**

**Children and young people will be provided with the knowledge they need to engage fully in decision making processes. Information will be easily understood, child friendly and produced in a range of accessible formats.**

It is important that we clearly explain to children and young people what the purpose of the engagement is, the extent of their involvement and what we are asking them to do. Any materials to be used (e.g. background papers, proposals, discussion documents, statistics, plans) should be written in child friendly language, avoid jargon, be short and easy to understand. Materials should also be accessible to children and young people with sensory and learning disabilities. Children and young people involved in the Disability and Transition thematic groups can advise on the development of suitable materials.

### **Standard 4: Feedback**

**Children and young people will be told about the outcomes of their involvement and how their input has been considered. Where their ideas have not been taken on board they will be told why this has happened.**

Children and young people have highlighted the importance of believing that their views are being taken seriously during engagements. It is, for them, a key factor in determining their willingness to take part in further engagements. Children and young people want to know how their input has influenced plans and decisions. They understand that change does not necessarily come about speedily and that not all their ideas will be reflected in final outcomes. Where this happens it is important that the reasons are explained, either during the engagement or in a follow up meeting / communication. We should establish a variety of mechanisms for communicating the on-going outcomes of engagements e.g. children's e-

zine, young people's website, posting on social networking sites. We should also involve children and young people in reviewing the impact and effectiveness of plans and services they have helped us to develop.

## **Standard 5: Inclusion**

**All children and young people will be facilitated to engage in public decision making processes. Particular measures will be put in place to ensure the involvement of those who are vulnerable and marginalised, in line with Section 75 and UNCRC obligations.**

We need to ensure that this strategy is equality proofed and that it supports us to engage with all children and young people who are affected by our work. It is important that we create opportunities to engage with our most marginalised children and young people, in ways that take account of their particular support requirements. To ensure full inclusion we should seek the assistance of specialist agencies from among our partnership members and where necessary from further afield. Opportunities for engagement should be widely publicised in accessible formats.

## **Standard 6: Respect**

**Children and young people will be treated with respect. They will decide the nature and extent of their involvement, including the option not to participate.**

We can demonstrate respect for the children and young people with whom we engage by ensuring that their involvement is real and meaningful. This means that we will take their views seriously; prepare ourselves for the engagement; be honest and open about what they can or cannot influence; ensure that our processes are transparent; offer constructive challenge; encourage them to set their own agendas and bring their issues to the table; ensure that they are able to freely choose whether to participate or not and fully acknowledge their contribution.

## **Standard 7: Senior People**

**Children and young people will have direct contact with senior people who are in a position to make decisions and take action in relation to their ideas, views and experiences.**

Participation is most effective and satisfying when it involves direct contact and dialogue between children and young people and those who are responsible for crafting plans and developing services. Reading reports or hearing accounts from third parties cannot match the impact of hearing a young person share their experiences and articulate their needs and ideas. Wherever possible CYPSP staff and/or members of the regional, outcomes or locality planning groups should be present during engagements.

## **Standard 8: Timing**

**Children and young people will be involved at the earliest possible stages of policy and service development, including processes to establish the need for service or policy initiatives.**

Planning integrated services for children and young people is a complex process involving a number of stages. If participation is to be meaningful it is important that children and young people's experiences, views and ideas inform every stage and level of the planning process. It is of critical importance that children and young people are engaged, at the very outset of the planning process, in contributing to our understanding of the problems we are setting out to address. Their input in describing the problems they face, giving their views of current services and offering their ideas for solutions, provides an invaluable perspective during the first stages of planning.

## Participation Model

We need to ensure that the voices, experiences, views and perspectives of children and young people become a central focus and fully integrated element of our partnership. In developing a model for that participation we should ensure that it will:

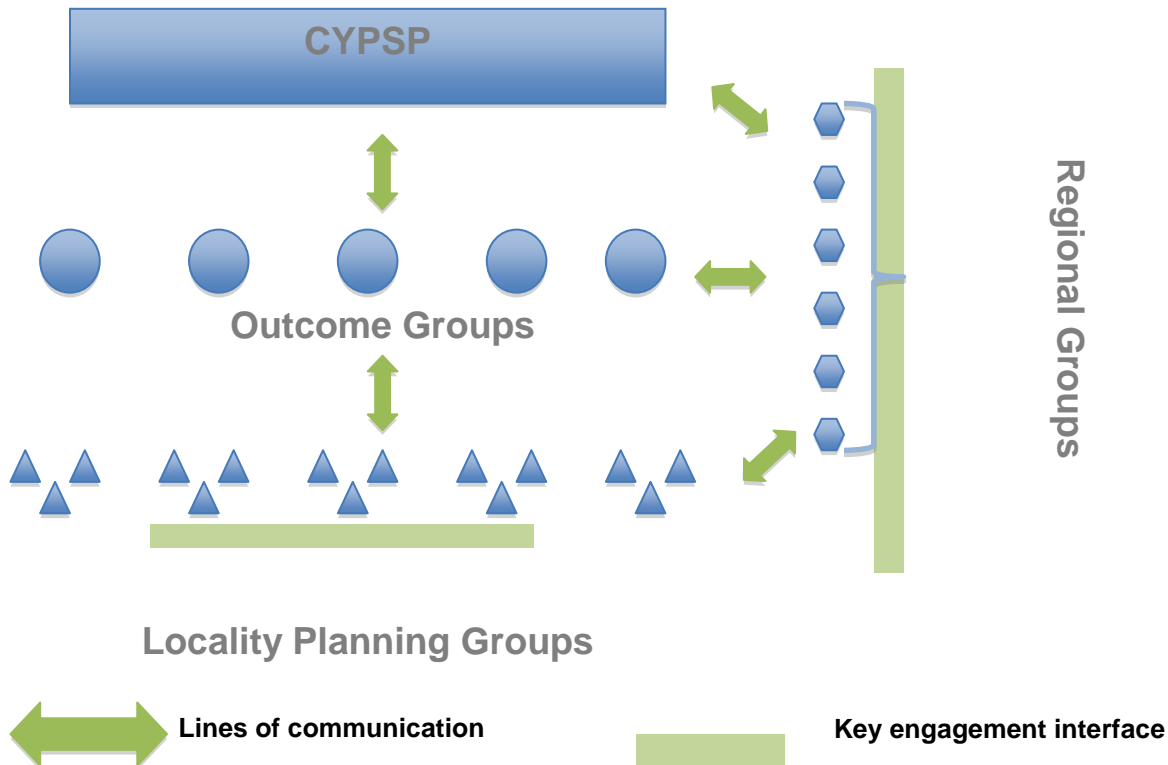
- Reflect the “Ask First” standards;
- Encompass a variety of routes / mechanisms through which children and young people can participate in the earliest stages of the planning process;
- Work alongside the overall CYPSP structure, ensuring that children and young people’s experiences, views and perspectives are heard and considered at both regional and local levels;
- Build upon existing participative mechanisms and the practice of partner agencies;
- Be simple, transparent and accessible to all children and young people;
- Clearly set out who is responsible for ensuring participation at each level;
- Be sustainable, realistic and economically viable;
- Be accompanied by an on-going development / implementation plan which establishes a vision, sets out clear priorities and incorporates processes for capacity building, support and review.

The CYPSP is a new partnership and while it is essential that children and young people’s participation is planned and implemented from the outset, it is also important that we take the time to develop a fully comprehensive model. It takes a considerable investment of time and resources to properly embed a culture of participation across a complex system. It therefore seems sensible to adopt a staged approach. We must ensure that we create a stable foundation upon which we can continue to build as the partnership develops.

Given that planning begins at operational level our first task should be to develop direct participation processes at key interface points i.e. the locality planning groups and the regional sub-groups. In doing so, we must also



ensure that the needs, experiences, ideas, views and perspectives contributed within those fora are communicated to both the Outcomes Groups and the Regional Partnership body; and that they are incorporated into the NI Children and Young People's Plan.



In addition, given that four out of the five Outcomes Groups are being set up shortly, we should encourage each Outcomes Group to bear in mind the need to ensure the participation of children and young people in their planning process.

When we have had a period of supporting participation through the regional sub groups and locality planning groups, we will review our learning from both the perspectives of children and young people and the agencies involved in those fora. This should help us to determine a clear plan for further developing the model, for example; considering:

- how we might facilitate direct engagement with Outcomes groups, other sub-groups and the CYPSP itself;

- how children and young people might be involved in budgeting and commissioning decisions;
- how children and young people might be involved in monitoring the progress of action plans;
- how we might establish mechanisms for being held accountable by children and young people collectively, for example; through an annual review seminar / conference.

## Implementation

While some Outcomes Group, Regional sub groups and locality planning groups are already established, others are currently in development. The sub structure of the partnership is in the process of transition and this is likely to continue for some time.

However, it is important to acknowledge that participative work is already underway and that this work should continue while a broader system of participation is being developed.

Those groups which have been established (and others as they come on line) should create a plan for ensuring the participation of children and young people in their work. The Participation Network can facilitate the planning process and provide on-going advice and support to the group.

The Participation Plan emerging from each group will be suited to their particular circumstances but, to ensure consistency and compatibility, each should be developed through a similar process, including some or all of the following elements.

Each group nominates one of their members to serve as Participation Champion. That person will have responsibility for driving the group participation plan and:

- liaising with CYPSP staff and the Participation Network;
- ensuring the group identifies and avails of opportunities for engaging children and young people in line with the ASK FIRST standards;
- ensuring that children and young people who have engaged with the group are kept informed of how their input has influenced the planning process;

- ensuring the messages emerging from engagements are both reflected in the group's plans and communicated to the Outcomes Groups and CYPSP.

Group members should attend training with the Participation Network either as a group, or through signing up individually for open sessions.

The plan should address the following areas:

- **Who the group needs to engage with;-**  
For some groups e.g. the Regional Disability theme based group it will be obvious which children and young people should be involved, but even within this it may be important to distinguish according to e.g. age, living with parents or independently, different types of disability etc. The locality planning groups are likely to have a wider range of children and young people who might contribute to their work.
- **What the group needs to know from children and young people;-**  
This might include having children and young people identify their needs; raise their own issues; describe their life experiences; comment on service delivery; generate ideas/solutions; review plans; take part in making decisions.
- **Where children and young people can be accessed;-**  
For some groups this will be very straightforward as children and young people will be full members of the group. But even here there will be occasions when a wider range of inputs may be sought. Each group should create a directory of organisations that can facilitate their access to particular groups of children and young people. These agencies may be members of the group, they may be regionally based or active in the local area, or they may be drawn from the Participation Network directory of organisations.
- **How they will engage with children and young people;-**  
In some instances groups may have been established with the express purpose of ensuring the participation of children and young people. For example; the Regional Disability theme based group. In such cases participation is integral and central to the whole group process.

Some groups may devise engagement exercises with specific groups of children and young people for particular purposes e.g. to hear about their needs, to ask their opinions about the service they receive, or to find out their ideas about, or solutions to, local problems. These might be one off engagements with a range of groups or may require developing close on-going relationships with a small number of groups on the basis that they are particularly relevant to the work or are active in the local community. More comprehensive, large scale, exercises may also be designed, if necessary, where resources are available. Opportunities might also be developed for hearing from large numbers of children and young people through on-line social media or establishing a local, issue based or regional website.

- **How** the input from children and young people will be communicated throughout the CYPSP system.

It is important that everyone involved in the CYPSP has the opportunity to hear, and act upon, key messages from children and young people. Equally we need to avoid duplication and make sure that different groups are not talking to the same young people about the same things. It may be useful to set up a central newsletter through which groups can advise what engagements they are involved in and share the key messages or learning.

Other mechanisms may be needed for theme based groups composed of children and young people – in these cases a liaison person from the Outcomes group may meet regularly with the group, or children and young people might do presentations at Outcomes group meetings.

The CYPSP will need to consider how the participation work can best be co-ordinated and what mechanisms will be needed to support the development of a robust, cohesive participation system. The Participation Network is happy to provide on-going advice.