



Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council

Children & Young People's Participation Strategy

2021–2024

Forewords



"It has been great that the Youth Forum, Children In Care and Children with SEND have co-designed this participation strategy. It is important that children and young people have their voices heard both in important documents and at meetings. In Blackburn with Darwen we are supported to gather as many views, wishes and feelings from young people across the borough. This enables us as Youth MPs to advocate on their behalf".

Blackburn with Darwen Youth MPs, 2021/22



"I am so proud that our Participation Strategy is driven by our young people, who better to influence the decision and policy making that will affect them and their peers for future years? This strategy sets out what meaningful participation is, whose responsibility it is and how we will know that we are getting participation right.

If you need a contribution that will lead to positive action and ideas for improving outcomes then look no further than the young people of Blackburn with Darwen".

Clr Julie Gunn

Executive Member for Children, Young People & Education



"I want to thank all of the children and young people who have worked alongside us to develop BwD's Participation Strategy. Your involvement and engagement with how we ensure that we listen, act and review the work that we do day in day out is crucially important. As such, I will ensure that our Participation Strategy becomes a part of my and every member of staff's guide to how you want us to work with you".

Jayne Ivory

Strategic Director for Children's Services & Education

What does participation mean to us?

“Participation is the involvement of people in the decisions and processes that affect their lives, including sharing information, consulting, managing, making decisions and taking action”.

– Quote by Tearfund

To us at Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council, participation is the process by which individuals and groups of individuals can influence decision making and bring about change.

All children and young people have the right to have their views, wishes and feelings taken into account when decisions are being taken about their life.

These decisions could be about their family, school or life in the community.

This right is protected under Article 12 in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This has been adopted into the United Kingdom legislation, such as the Children’s Act 2004, and all services and agencies have a duty to comply with this right.

“It’s important we get involved because adults don’t know how we feel or what we need, they just think they do!”

BwD Voice Forum



Greater levels of participation can result in a wide range of benefits for children and young people, service providers, and their local communities. This includes:

Children and young people

- Developing skills in decision-making, communication, confidence and resilience
- Opportunities to learn, to have fun and to achieve accreditation
- More chances to have a say in the things that matter in their lives

Service providers

- Improved, better targeted and more effective services for children, young people and their families
- Better use of financial resources
- Meets government objectives and inspection processes

Communities

- Develops more positive community relationships between children, young people and adults
- Improved sense of community and belonging
- Enhanced citizenship and political education



“Participation enables us to come together and make decisions that have a positive influence, by using our energy and experience to change the world into a better place”.

BwD Youth Forum



Our Engagement Model

Children and young people have told us how they would like to be engaged in participation work – this includes using the correct venue, language and mediums, and providing the right support.

HOW CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WANT US TO WORK WITH THEM....



INFORMATION & ENGAGEMENT

To be informed about and involved in procedures, decisions, concerns and plans



EXPLANATION

To be informed of the outcome when children and young people have been consulted with



VENUE

To have a safe and fun environment to participate



RESPECT

To be treated with dignity and respect



ADVOCACY

To be provided with advocacy to assist children and young people in putting forward their views



SUPPORT

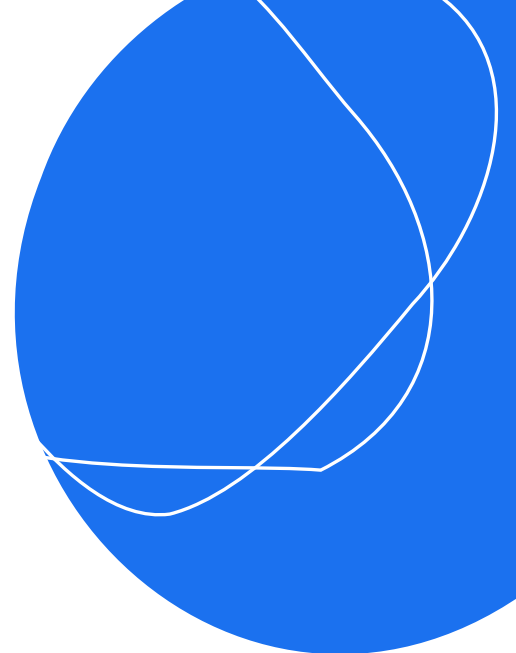
To be provided with support so all children and young people can be fully supported in participation activities



UNDERSTANDING

To understand what is happening, to be heard and understood, and to have their views and thoughts acted on

What is a participation strategy?



Any good strategy sets out shortly and simply:

- what is important and that needs to be done
- why it is important to do these things
- how it will be done
- how we will know if it is making a difference
- that everyone involved will try their best to get it done

A good strategy includes all the people it will affect, in:

- writing it in the first place
- making sure it is still relevant in the future
- checking if it is making anything better, and if it is, understanding by how much, and if not, deciding what needs to be done differently

A participation strategy shares how different groups of people (usually a business or organisation, others that they work with and, most importantly, their customers) will learn from each other and how they will use what they have learned to make and do things better.

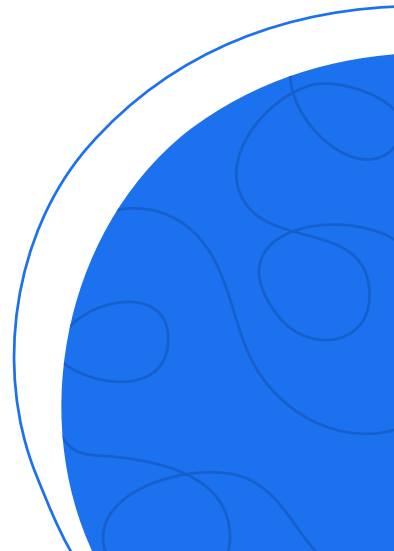
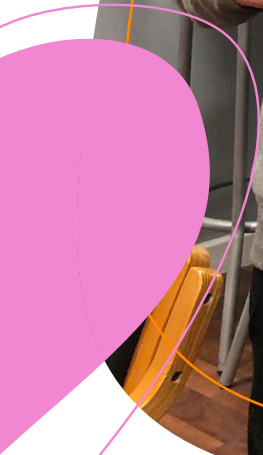
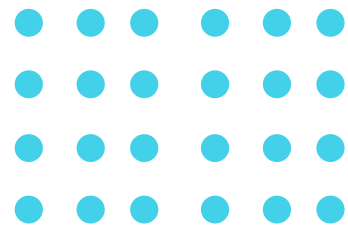
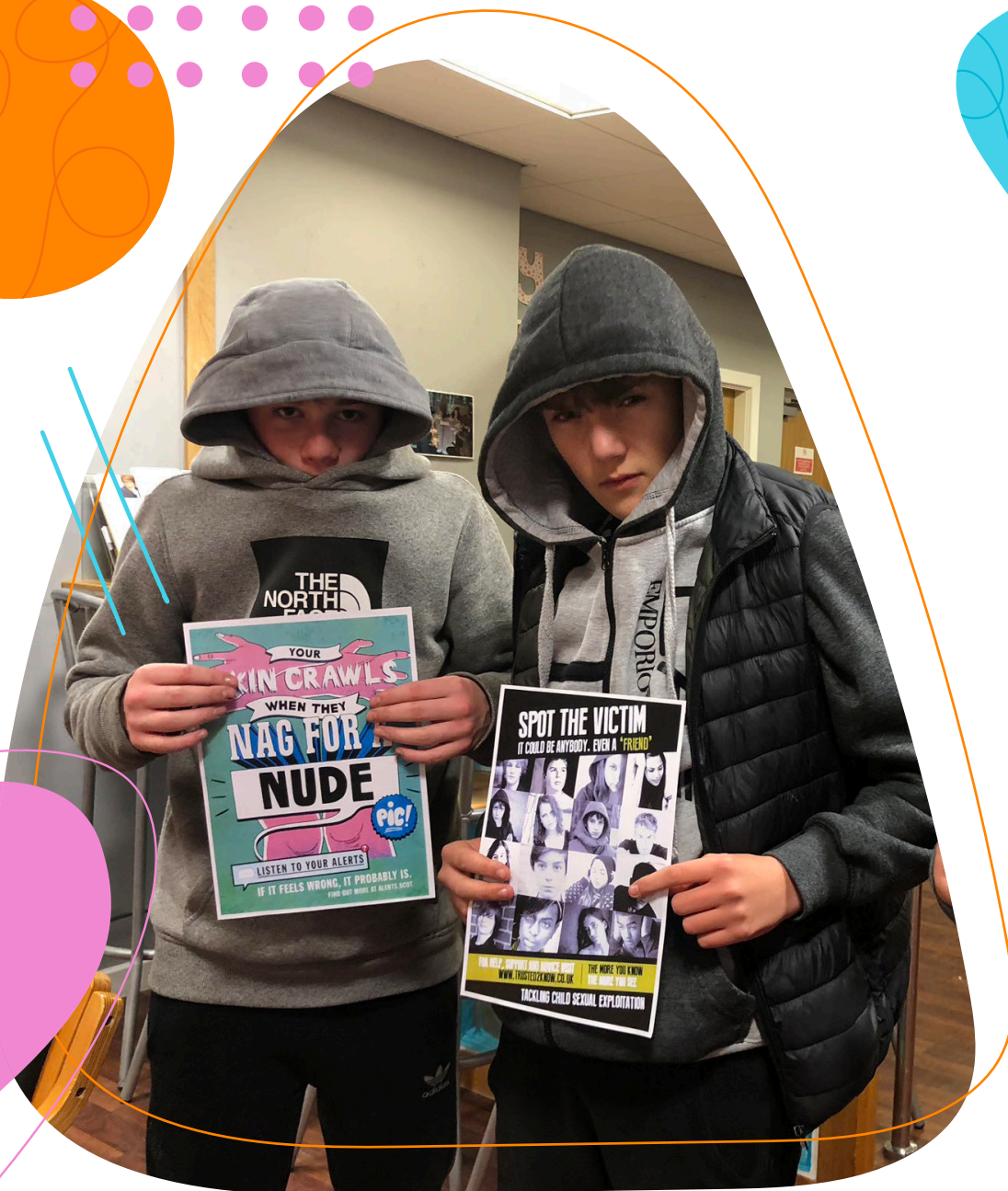
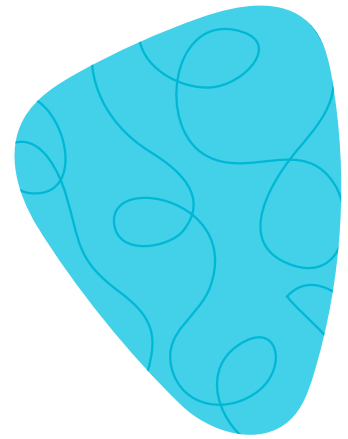
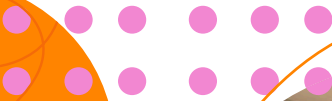
This could include different people sharing information on:

- what is really important to them
- what helps them and what would help them
- what they like and do not like

This strategy is all about how the council will work together with children and young people in Blackburn with Darwen to improve what is available for them.

Children and young people have helped us to understand the best ways we can do this and have worked with us to write this strategy. They have told us what works well, what can work better and how they want to be worked with.

How will this strategy help children and young people in Blackburn with Darwen?



Blackburn with Darwen should be a place where all children and young people expect to live happy, healthy and fulfilled lives and where they have the chance to:



Enjoy learning and do well



Be healthy and happy



Be prepared for adult life



Have opportunities to get a rewarding job



Be and feel safe and listened to

To get there we will need to listen to children and young people to understand what really matters to them. We then need to make sure that we hear and act on their ideas for making improvements. This is sometimes called a '**doing with us, not to us**' approach.

To do this properly we need to make sure all children and young people have the chance to help us get better at what we do. Being able to take part is not always easy and this can be for lots of different reasons. As such, we need to make sure that it is easy for everyone to join in, if and when they want to.

It is important to provide a safe and enjoyable environment for children and young people to participate fully. Young people have told us they want to be engaged and participate in friendly and welcoming buildings, such as youth clubs, and have the chance to take part in positive activities and residential.



Example of listening to children and young people

Forum members told us that, when Covid-19 restrictions were relaxed, they wanted to meet up at a youth centre rather than online. We listened and the Forum and Voice groups now meet up face-to-face in Blackburn weekly.

Our priorities: what is important to us?

What is important to Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council?

It is really important to the council that we have the right services and support available, in the right place, and that these services are good services, which are delivered to high standards. To do this as best as we can we need to work in co-production.

What is co-production?

There will always be times when it is good to share information (communicate) and ask people's opinions on different options (consult), but wherever possible we should be co-producing.

Co-production recognises people who live in the community, our staff and other organisations all have important contributions to make when planning, developing, delivering and reviewing services. This is due to their different knowledge, skills and experience.

Put simply, co-production is '**doing something together**'.

Where services for children and young people are being considered, children and young people are central to co-production.

Working together to get it right

To get services for children and young people right we need to really listen to their views to understand what they need, and how we can best deliver this.

We will then need to act on what we have learned.

In many cases, this will involve working with our partners. This could include working with other organisations in the health, voluntary and private business sectors as well as other local councils.

Working together with children and young people will help us to better meet their needs, aspirations and ambitions, alongside the needs of their families.

It will also help us to make the best use of our resources. This includes things like money, staff time, buildings and equipment. Working in co-production will help us to make sure that our resources are used to improve the areas of the greatest value to children and young people locally.

What is important to children and young people in Blackburn with Darwen?

"Having regular group meetings with staff who understand our needs"

"Having the support from adults in meetings and through consultations"

"We want our opinions and suggestions to be listened to and acted upon"

"We want to have a two way conversation with adults - we don't want to be talked at"

"Being able to meet and work with a diverse group of young people to create positive change in our community"

Participation Pathway

We see participation as a journey - or a pathway. It is a pathway where young people can feel comfortable contributing in all or just some aspects. It is also a journey that can have many wrong turns if not followed correctly! On the next page, we have illustrated what we mean by the participation pathway.

PARTICIPATION PATHWAY



02

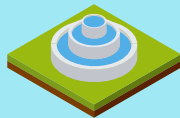
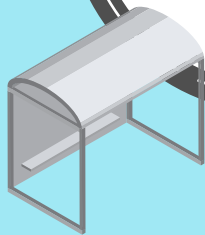
DIRECTION

Adult-led activities in which children and young people do as they are told without understanding the purpose of the activity

04

CONSULTATION

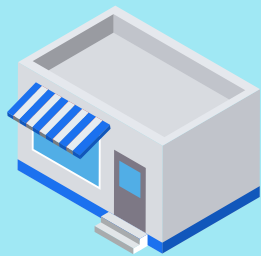
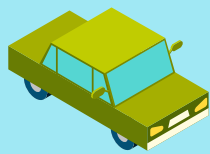
The project is designed and run by adults, but children and young people understand the process and their opinions are gathered and treated seriously



06

CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON INITIATED

Children and young people plan and select their own activities and adults participate rather than lead on them



01

COMMUNICATION

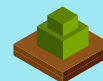
Just sharing information with children and young people i.e. no input



03

TOKENISM

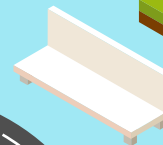
Adult-led activities in which children and young people may be consulted but with minimal opportunities for feedback, or feedback is not taken seriously



05

CO-PRODUCTION

Adults, children and young people working together to influence the support and services on offer during the design, delivery and review stages



07

CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON LED

Children and young people lead on projects and events. Adults may observe and assist, but they do not interfere with the process or play a managerial role



What are we doing well?

What we think we are doing well...

- Established voice groups for Universal and Targeted CIOC Children and Young People
- Established relationships with schools and Strategic Youth Alliance (SYA) partners - the SYA is a network of all the local youth organisations
- Children's Services have located all Adolescent services under one Senior Leader significantly improving collaborative working and extending reach to gather the voices of the many
- Developed training and support around Young People's Interview panels to ensure young people have a voice in recruitment and selection
- Youth MPs (or representatives) are supported to contribute and challenge at the Councils Key Strategic Meetings: Executive Board, Scrutiny Meetings, Children's Partnership Board
- Two care leavers have been recruited to the position of vice chair of the Corporate Parenting Executive Group
- Care Leaver vice chairs lead on developing and delivering annual corporate parent conference
- Support children and young people to co design projects by inviting organisations to young people's forums
- Monthly online leaving care forum to gather young people's thoughts, feelings and wishes. This information is then fed back to the corporate parenting boards through the leaving care vice chair
- Training and support for children and young people for recruitment in roles within Children's Services
- Children and young people have the opportunity to take part in local, regional and national consultations e.g. Make Your Mark, youth elections
- Training delivered for capturing the voice of the child
- Within our Early Years settings, we actively listen to children to enable children to plan and this promotes active participation from all children in what is important to them and their own decision making

What children and young people think we are doing well...



"We meet regularly and have new forum members joining all the time"



"We are supported in lots of meetings to have our voice heard"



"When we want to speak to key professionals in Education & Health, our workers ensure that they are invited to come and speak with us. Our workers also ensure that they feedback regarding any suggestions we make"

"We get fantastic opportunities to take part in regional meetings with other Youth Forums from across the North West"



"We take part in lots of meetings and consultations but we also get to do fun activities and go on residential"



How we are going to do better...

It is important that the council and our partners acknowledge the important and necessary role that children and young people can play in shaping the design and delivery of services.

To improve the way that we work with children and young people in future, we have developed a set of pledges and categorised them under these headings:



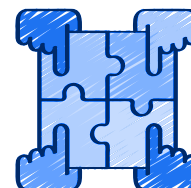
Heart

The values and attitudes we will display when we work with children and young people



Head

The knowledge, skills and processes we need to develop so we can make participation even better



Hands

Putting our values and skills into action - the key things we plan to do over the next three years

Heart



Values and attitudes

We will:

- Treat children and young people with respect and dignity
- Use a variety of communication methods to engage children and young people with differing learning styles
- Embed relationship based practice at the heart of our delivery strategy

Head



Knowledge, skills and processes

We will:

- Recruit experienced staff with a passion for making things better
- Develop a bespoke Young Inspectors model to add further Quality Assurance value
- Develop the Investors in Children accreditation via a network of Participation Champions

Hands



The doing of what we think and feel

We will:

- Use social media to share information about things for children and young people to do
This includes the chance to attend events and complete surveys. We will also use the council website to do this.
- Make sure the venues we use are comfortable, safe, friendly and welcoming
- Introduce a Young Inspectors scheme, so that young people can inspect the services they receive in Blackburn with Darwen

Participation Framework

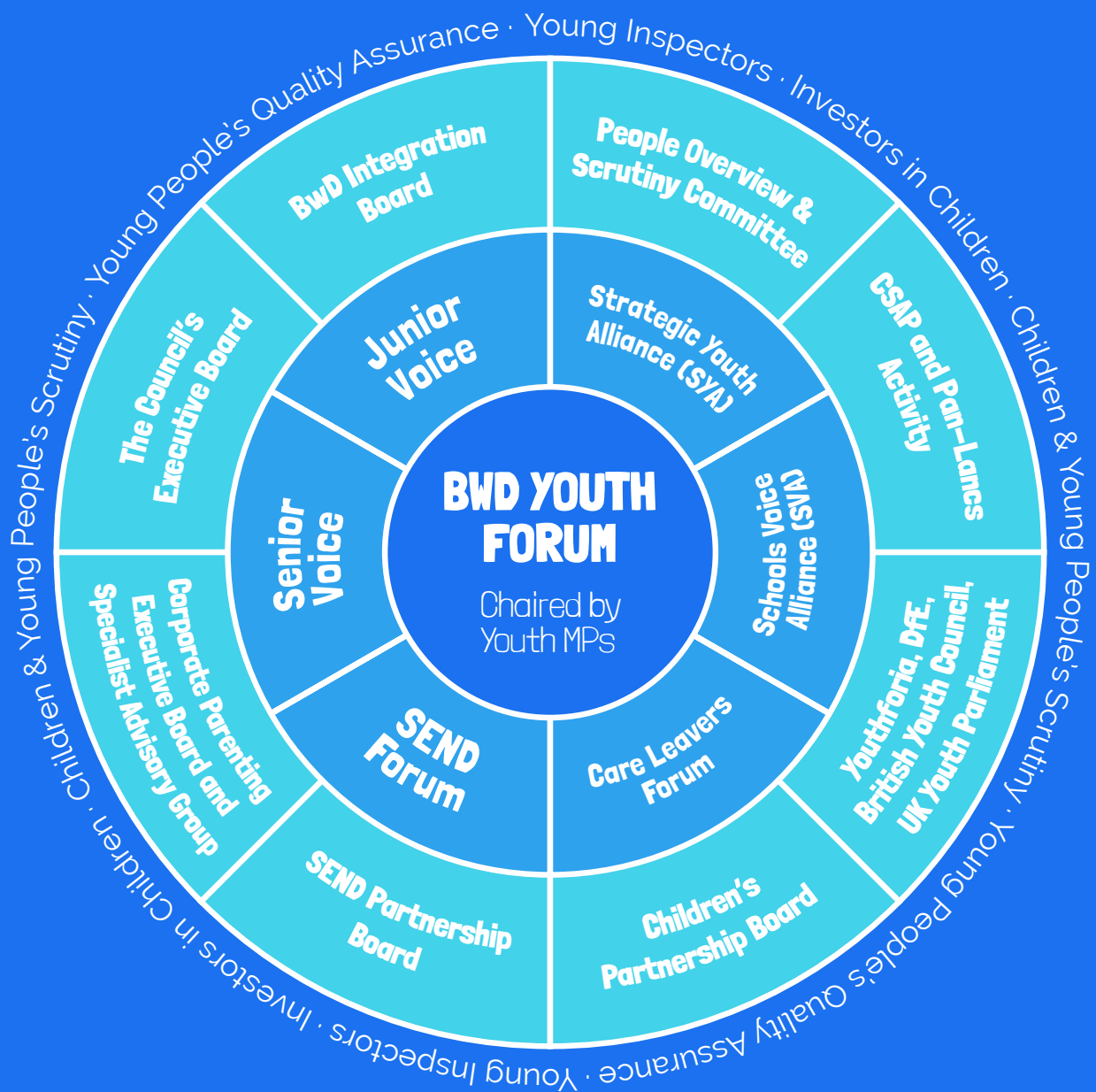
An important part of our plans for doing better is our Participation Framework.

This framework sets out the council's commitment and approach to involving children and young people in all areas of decision making, and in taking their views seriously.

Young people in the various Forums and groups will be supported in attending all important meetings, boards and committees to ensure that their voice, and the voices they represent, are taken seriously and acted upon by everyone.

Participation Framework

The framework below illustrates how each specific Forum fits into the wider framework and contributes equally to capturing, scrutinising, reporting and evaluating youth voice activity.



Blackburn with Darwen Youth Forum

Led by the elected Youth MPs, this is a universal opportunity to participate in youth voice activity. This means all children and young people can take part.

Targeted Forums

Forums for specific groups of children and young People – ranging from Children in Our Care, SEND and School Forums.

Strategic Youth Alliance

The Strategic Youth Alliance (SYA) forum includes a senior management representative of each of the local youth organisations that form the SYA.

Two young people have been nominated to attend monthly meetings from their youth organisations to discuss issues and campaigns. This forum is led by the Youth MPs who will then advocate for the SYA Forum on their behalf at important meetings.

Schools Voice Alliance

The Schools Voice Alliance (SVA) is a forum consisting of 2 young people from each school within the borough. Representatives from each school will collect views and opinions from the students and forward these to the Youth MPs at quarterly meetings across the year. This would be collected from general discussion and the wider schools thoughts on issues affecting Young People within the borough.

Executive Board and Committees

These are executive-led decision making and scrutiny boards. This is where your voice gets the ears of senior managers and leaders. We will ensure your voices are heard, understood and acted upon.

Quality Assurance

These are various internal and external accreditation, scrutiny committees and award bodies. This is where we ensure that participation activity is challenged and supported to ensure it is doing what it is meant to.

We will use the framework to ensure your voice is heard, captured, listened to and acted upon.

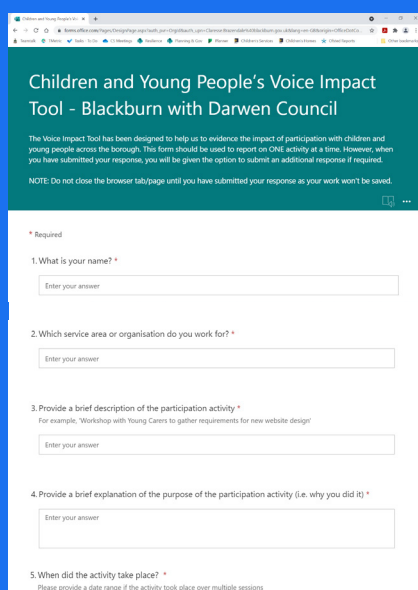
Children and Young People's Voice Impact Tool

To ensure we capture all youth voice activity accurately, we have developed a new Children and Young People's Voice Impact Tool that will be completed and submitted by the Participation Champion for each organisation or service area on a quarterly basis.

The evidence submitted is assessed on the following:

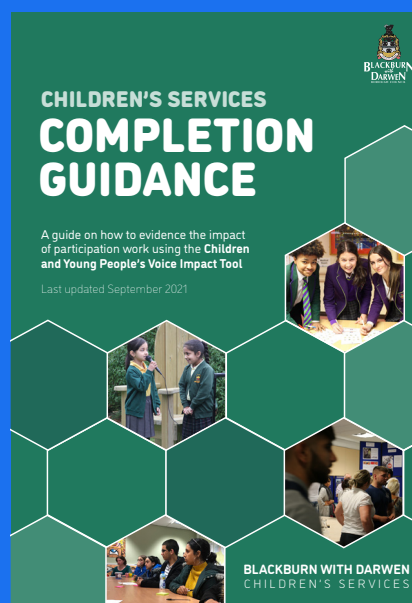
- The details of the activity
- The impact that participation activity has had
- The quality of the work and an honest evaluation and feedback

This information will be shared at strategic meetings both by professionals and children and young people.



The screenshot shows a web browser displaying the 'Children and Young People's Voice Impact Tool - Blackburn with Darwen Council'. The form is titled 'Children and Young People's Voice Impact Tool - Blackburn with Darwen Council' and includes a note: 'The Voice Impact Tool has been designed to help us to evidence the impact of participation with children and young people across the borough. This form should be used to report on ONE activity at a time. However, when you have submitted your response, you will be given the option to submit an additional response if required. NOTE: Do not close the browser tab/page until you have submitted your response as your work won't be saved.' The form contains five numbered questions, each with a text input field and a 'Required' asterisk:

1. What is your name? *
2. Which service area or organisation do you work for? *
3. Provide a brief description of the participation activity *
For example: 'Workshop with young Carers to gather requirements for new website design'
4. Provide a brief explanation of the purpose of the participation activity (i.e. why you did it) *
5. When did the activity take place? *
Please provide a date range if the activity took place over multiple sessions





**How will we know if
we are doing better and
making a difference?**

We will know when we are doing better and making a difference because children and young people in Blackburn with Darwen will see, say and feel the following things...

See



Children and young people in Blackburn with Darwen will see...

- improvements made as a result of their ideas
- more children and young people taking part in activities and enjoying what is on offer in the community
- people making healthy choices
- more young people enrolling in education or training when they leave school
- more young people with good jobs and high aspirations for their futures

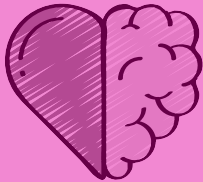
Say



Children and young people in Blackburn with Darwen will say...

- how their thoughts and ideas have helped to make positive changes
- they have lots of different things to do that they enjoy
- they feel confident in their abilities to make good decisions and know where to go and who to ask if they need help
- they are happy to go to school/college and when they're there they learn lots
- they work in a job they wanted, or are confident they will get the job they want

Feel



Children and young people in Blackburn with Darwen will feel...

- they are listened to and that their thoughts and opinions matter
- safe, welcome and included
- they get the right help and support, when and where they need it
- they have lots of opportunities available locally to help them socialise, learn, achieve and be healthy
- they are prepared and confident to move into adulthood
- that they are having fun and learning

How To Get Involved

If you are aged between 8 and 25 years, are in the care of the local authority and would like to have your voice heard, why not get involved in our Forums?

For more information about the Junior, Senior or Leaving Care Forums please contact Liz Clarkson on 01254 298630 or elizabeth.clarkson@blackburn.gov.uk

If you are aged between 11 and 18 years, you can also take part in the BwD Youth Forum or stand for election as Youth MP. To find out more, contact Liz Clarkson on 01254 298630 or email elizabeth.clarkson@blackburn.gov.uk

You can get up to date information via bwd-yps.co.uk or our social media sites:



facebook.com/BWDYoungPeoplesServices



twitter.com/bwd_yps



instagram.com/bwd_yps



Thank you to the children and young people of the Senior and Junior Voice forums, BwD Youth Forum, KND SEND group, Inclusion group and Leaving Care forum and who have produced this strategy in collaboration with us.

