

Children's Trust

'Seen and Heard'

2007-09

**An Engagement Strategy for Children and Young People in
Barking and Dagenham**

Executive Summary

The Children's Trust is committed to working together to put children and young people first by actively seeking to listen, hear and understand their views and opinions about how the council and its partners deliver services, which impact on their lives.

This strategy sets out how the Council and its partners will work together to improve the way we communicate, consult and engage with children and young people in Barking and Dagenham. Delivering this strategy will play a significant role in delivering our vision '*Together we will build communities and transform lives*'.

We aim to ensure that children and young people:

- have a 'voice' and are able to contribute to their local communities and feel heard and valued;
- can take an active part in running the institutions they come into most contact with and develop as citizens through their involvement in these processes;
- have increased number of opportunities to get involved in the design, provision and evaluation of services and policies they use or that have a direct effect on them.

We will do this by:

- improving the understanding and skills of staff so they can confidently engage children and young people;
- co-ordinating and disseminating good practice between partners about effective techniques of engagement;
- increasing the number, range and quality of consultations that include children and young people's views;
- increasing the feedback of engagement activities to children and young people;
- working individually with departments and organisations on specific engagement projects and initiatives.

1 Foreword

An engagement strategy for children and young people is the start of a large change in culture for workers in the borough. We know of some very good examples where young people's views are taken into account, when planning services (for example, in the children and young people's plan's consultation process). However, in the past, engaging children, young people and families in planning, monitoring and assessing services has been patchy at best across the borough.

The Victorian saying 'children should be seen and not heard' is a reminder that children and young people have not always been appreciated or listened to. Children and young people represent a growing and very significant part of Barking and Dagenham's population and giving this group a real voice and role in the decision-making process is likely to improve the quality of decisions we make and services we provide. This strategy outlines how we are determined to engage with children and young people to listen to their views and opinions on a range of related subjects.

As users of our services, children and young people are in the best position to not only comment on issues but to be involved in negotiating and influencing decisions that affect them and their communities. To allow this to happen, any engagement opportunities that take place with young people must be recorded so that an effective assessment can take place, good practice is identified and lessons are learnt for the future.

We must reach out to all children aged 0 to 19, making sure that the youngest children particularly are able to express their needs in relation to services. We must also make sure that we target vulnerable children and those who are traditionally hardest to reach. This is both because they often access the most services and the widest range of services and because their voices are often not heard. This group would include looked-after children, children in need of protection, disabled children and those identified with special-education needs, children from some ethnic-minority backgrounds, young children, young people in trouble, refugees and children from traveller communities, among others.

We will engage children and young people in developing all services. As well as making sure that children's services engage the main users, we also need to work with other council services (such as parks, leisure and housing) and partners including the police, probation service, health trusts and the voluntary and community sectors, to make sure we take the needs of children and families into account. Most importantly, the strategy must be robust and we must be clear on the effects and success of our engagement activity. There is a risk that engagement becomes a benefit in itself without being assessed for how effective it actually is.

The strategy will help to co-ordinate all youth engagement in Barking and Dagenham and help organisations to more consistently plan their approach to allowing children and young people to take part. We want this strategy to

widen the opportunities for involvement, allow innovation and help develop best practice.

The Barking and Dagenham (BAD) Youth Forum endorses this engagement strategy as it sets out how we want to be consulted and involved in the Council's decision-making processes and will help to increase the size and strength of the Forum.

Roger Luxton, Chair of Children's Trust and Director of Children's Services, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham

Councillor Jeanne Alexander, Lead Member, Children's Services

Jordan Roy, Chair of Barking and Dagenham (BAD) Youth Forum

2 What we mean by children and youth engagement

Engagement must mean more than just listening to or consulting children, young people, families and the wider community. The aim of engaging service users and potential users in designing, developing and delivering services is to make sure that children and young people are able to see how their input shapes and informs outcomes and helps to prioritise investment.

For the sake of this strategy, we will use the following definition,

Children and youth engagement includes all activities that support the genuine involvement of children and young people in positively shaping what gets done and the way services are planned, delivered and evaluated

3 Aims

- To involve and consult as many children and young people as possible in the planning, delivery and evaluation of services;
- To provide opportunities for children and young people to engage in citizenship activities of their own choice;
- To give children and young people access to guidance and support to make informed choices about their lives;
- To create and maintain a culture of successful and fun engagement through a structure of groups and forums which feed into the adult decision-making structures;
- To give children and young people options to get involved in the decision-making process to the extent they want.

4 Who the strategy is for

- Partners involved in delivering services in Barking and Dagenham which have an effect on young people (for example, youth workers, social workers, teachers, Connexions personal advisors and housing officers).
- Partners involved in setting policies in Barking and Dagenham which have an effect on young people.
- Stakeholders such as residents and members of voluntary or community organisations interested in improving local democracy and the quality of young people's lives in Barking and Dagenham.

5 What are the benefits?

Children and young people make up a high percentage of the total population in Barking and Dagenham, with the borough having the second highest percentage of its population under the age of 18 in London and the highest percentages in the 0 to 10 age group. Statistics from the 2001 Census showed that there were 38,354 children and young people aged 0 to 15 (from

a total population of 163,944) living in Barking and Dagenham. It is essential that as a borough we start to engage with our future adults now and demonstrate to them that Barking and Dagenham is interested in their views and opinions.

For children and young people, engagement can lead to better, more appropriate services being delivered. Engagement activities should lead to wider access to services for children and young people. This in turn can help to build the skills, confidence and self-esteem children and young people need to communicate, negotiate and debate and can also benefit their personal development.

By engaging children and young people at an early stage, we have an opportunity to build their skills, promote children's rights, improve services and decision-making, increase awareness of local opportunities to get involved, and provide information on how we and our partners work. A genuine approach to engagement with children and young people can lead to benefits for organisations, young people and the community.

For organisations, engagement can lead to better targeted services that meet the needs of children and young people by making sure the services are used. This helps save money and makes sure organisations are responsible for what they do. Organisations can use engagement to adapt their services to better suit and benefit their service users, and this could include making changes to existing services or introducing new ones.

For the wider community, engagement can promote understanding of services and the needs of young people, an increased sense of democracy and help to reduce conflict between different generations.

6 Background

The local authority has a legal duty to involve and engage local stakeholders and particularly children and young people. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1988) and the 1989 Human Rights Act both say that children and young people have a right to express their views freely and have them taken into account in matters that affect them.

The 1989 Children Act states that looked-after children should be involved in decisions about the care they receive. Engaging and involving young people is a vital part of the Government's White Paper 'Strong and Prosperous Communities' (2006).

The 2006 Lyons Report, 'National Prosperity, Local Choice and Civic Engagement', also stresses that more effective local government will need to rely on more meaningful engagement with local people and greater local leadership. An important part of the document is the principle that we will only achieve lasting and positive change for young people if we place them at the centre of our policies and services. Giving young people this power gives a clear message that they are supported and trusted to make decisions. It

gives them the chance to act responsibly and to take an active role in decision-making and leadership in their communities.

The 2004 Children Act provides the legal framework to support the changes outlined in 'Every Child Matters'. Children and young people must be involved in planning, delivering and assessing services and policies relevant to them. This includes the involvement of children and young people in the Common Assessment process, the development of the new service directory and the implementation of the information sharing index and the information sharing protocols, agreements and training.

The Russell Commission Report (2005) outlined a national framework for engaging young people to deliver changes in the range, quality and amount of opportunities, for young people to volunteer. 'Youth Matters' (2005), further outlines the Government's vision for giving young people more power by making sure they get the best information, advice, guidance, opportunities, choice and influence over services and facilities available to them.

The National Curriculum for Citizenship provides opportunities for children and young people to learn about their rights and responsibilities, government and democracy, and communities and identity. Citizenship is a foundation subject in the National Curriculum and there has been a legal duty for schools to teach the programme of study since September 2002.

The Childcare Act 2006 gives local authorities and their NHS and Jobcentre Plus partners a duty to work together to improve the outcomes of all children aged up to 5 and reduce inequalities between them and this includes listening to young children.

7 Links with other strategies

This strategy links with a number of key Council and partnership strategies. These include the borough's Community Strategy, 'Building Communities, Transforming Lives' and the Local Area Agreement (LAA), 2006, which acts as the plan for delivering the community strategy.

This strategy is a sub-strategy of the borough's Community Engagement and Consultation Strategy, 2006, which sets out how we should engage with all our stakeholders and builds on this with a specific focus on children and young people. It also links directly with the 2007 Neighbourhood Management Strategy and promotes the role that children and young people will have in this process.

The Engagement Strategy for Children and Young People has a clear link in relation to the emerging Community Cohesion Strategy. Children and young people were involved in helping to set the priorities of the Community Cohesion Strategy through a dedicated workshop at the Children and Young People's Conference on the 27th February 2007 and other outreach engagement activities. The common themes emerging from initial consultation

on the new strategy which define community cohesion in Barking and Dagenham are ***Safe, Fair, Together and Respect***.

This strategy contributes to the Children and Young People's Plan, 2006, particularly the aim of 'Making a positive contribution' through using children and young people's views and taking part in decision-making. The strategy also builds on the review of services for disabled children in 2006 and its recommendations around interaction and transition.

A Parenting Strategy 'Information, engagement, empowerment' is currently being developed for the borough and this will outline how parents, carers and families will be engaged in the decision making process in addition to children and young people. A strategy for Extended Schools is also being developed with a planned launch of August 2007 and this will outline how pupils, parents, teachers and the community will be consulted and engaged in the process.

8 Consultation

Children and young people have played a lead role in shaping the content, structure and direction. This included consulting school councils, children's centre development groups, voluntary-sector and other public-sector organisations. Over 200 children and young people were also consulted as part of the borough's first integrated conference for ages 8 – 19 on the 27th February 2007.

The BAD Youth Forum and particularly the Youth Senior Management Team (YSMT) have had a crucial role in this process and set out the standards expected from engaging with children and young people in the borough. Individual meetings have also been held with lead officers across the council and with 25 partner organisations that have a responsibility for engaging children and young people.

9 Principles

When involving and consulting young people, the following specific guidelines should be followed;

- all children and young people should have an equal opportunity to get involved and there should be a commitment to involve hard-to-reach groups;
- children and young people should be free to become involved and know that their contribution is valued and respected;
- children and young people should be treated honestly and helped to understand any practical, legal or political issues relating to their involvement;
- children and young people should be involved at the earliest practical stage;
- the purpose and timescale for an activity, and the intended outcomes, should be clear;

- children and young people should be told what they will personally achieve or gain from their involvement;
- appropriate techniques should be used to engage with children and young people depending on their age, needs and abilities and how mature they are;
- the contributions of young people should be taken seriously and acted upon and feedback should be given to them which describes the effects and results of their involvement;
- schemes should have suitable resources;
- outcomes from engagement activities should be shared with all relevant departments and partners to make sure the views of young people have as much of an effect as possible on how we plan and deliver services;
- issues relating to vulnerable children and young people, Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks and data protection should be considered;
- all schemes should be monitored and assessed to make sure these guidelines are followed;
- engagement procedures should be tailored to the complicated needs of the individual clients;
- relationship with children and young people should be developed to build trust;
- children and young people should be treated as service users and 'experts' in what they need from the services we provide;

10. Making it happen

The Children's Trust will use this strategy as the first step towards improving and co-ordinating youth engagement and working towards 'beacon' status for engaging children and young people. In order to do this,

We will,

- ensure that every service in the Council includes engagement as a key objective in its service scorecard;
- hold an annual integrated conference for children and young people on issues they decide;
- set up a school councils' forum with chairs and vice-chairs of school councils meeting every three months to discuss best practice and related issues;
- set up a teenage parents' forum as part of the Teenage Pregnancy Partnership, focusing on giving teenage parents the power to develop projects and monitor how services are provided;
- set up a cross-organisational officers' steering group to share best practice and co-ordinate engaging children and young people;
- introduce free Training courses for council and partner staff to successfully undertake 'children and youth engagement';
- develop our approach to engaging with the 0-5s;

- utilise technology and create a new website for children and young people in addition to looking at options such as text messaging and e-mail to use as possible methods for engagement and consultation;
- set up a young people's citizen panel;
- develop engagement projects and initiatives at a neighbourhood level, linking in with the approach to neighbourhood management.

These proposals will need to be planned carefully and given a high level of support to make sure that the schemes are developed at an appropriate level. The implementation plan (p.13-16) details how these outcomes will be achieved over the next two years.

11. Monitoring and evaluation

Children and young people are often asked for their views and opinions about a variety of issues and services, but sometimes the results of consultation and their involvement are not fed back. This strategy will act as the starting point to make sure that children and young people receive feedback on their input, so that a thorough assessment of the process can be made and so consultation is not just a one-off event.

A consultation board was set up by the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham in 2006, and currently any Council officer wanting to carry out consultation must get the board's approval. The Consultation Board will ensure that children and young people are involved in all appropriate Council consultations. The health service is also required to agree consultation processes with the Borough Health Scrutiny Panel.

This strategy will be closely monitored and assessed by the Children's Trust as part of the work of the Barking and Dagenham Partnership, to make sure that we and our partners put it into practice. There will also be a yearly review of the children and young people engagement strategy, with a yearly report published setting out how we are listening and responding to children and young people and how we are feeding back the results of this.

12 Possible challenges engaging with children and young people

It is important to be aware of possible challenges we have faced in the past with engaging with children and young people. These challenges could include the following.

- using jargon and language which children and young people do not understand;
- a lack of understanding among adults and young people about what consultation and engagement mean, or how they can be achieved;
- using traditional methods of engagement such as 'formal meetings' which children and young people may class as being boring;

- some young people may feel there is no point getting involved as nothing will change;
- the fact that young people in Barking and Dagenham do not necessarily speak with one voice and they are likely to have very different views;
- a lack of guidelines and training for staff to help them engage with children and young people.

These challenges will be met through the various actions detailed in the implementation plan in both building the capacity and confidence of officers to undertake children and youth engagement and in creating the necessary opportunities for children and young people to participate to the level they require.

Making it Happen – Implementation Plan

Outcomes	Aims	Key Tasks	Targets
<p>1.</p> <p>Increased engagement contributions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To involve as many children and young people as possible in the planning, delivery and evaluation of services which impact on their lives. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Every service in the Council includes engagement as key objective in its service scorecard Children and Young People consulted and involved in design of website 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Included as part of 2006/07 Scorecards with progress reviewed in advance of 2007/08 service scorecard development Children and young people website linked to LBBD set up – March 2008
<p>2.</p> <p>Citizen development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To create and maintain a culture of successful and fun engagement through a structure of groups and forums which feed into the adult decision-making structures. To provide opportunities for children and young people to engage in citizenship activities of their own choice 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> BAD Youth Forum to nominate representative onto the UK Youth Parliament. Investigate proposals for a Youth Mayor Develop a borough wide schools council forum with chairs and vice-chairs of school councils meeting every three months. Involve pupils in the consultation for children's centres, extended schools and building schools for the future. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Member elected and attending by July 2007 Updated proposal by December 2007 Schools Council forum established and meeting regularly by September 07 Phase 2 and 3 extended schools consultation programme implemented from April 2007

		<p>7. Promote community cohesion as part of citizenship agenda</p> <p>8. Engage young people in assessing innovative projects to achieve healthier lifestyles</p>	<p>7. Citizenship days held in schools with lead organisations and Young Foundation Leaders Project delivered by Dec 2008.</p> <p>8. Pilot a scheme in 2007/08</p>
<p>3.</p> <p>Increased opportunities to get involved</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To give children and young people access to guidance and support to make informed choices about their lives. To give children and young people options to get involved in the decision making process to the extent they want. 	<p>9. Hold an annual integrated conference for children and young people on issues they decide</p> <p>10. Increase opportunities for the engagement of children and young people regarding their housing options</p> <p>11. Set up children and young peoples Citizens Panel</p> <p>12. Focus on extending 0-5 engagement</p> <p>13. Increased understanding and awareness of engagement with disabled children</p>	<p>9. 1st Conference held on 27th Feb 2007 with planning of 2nd Conference starting from Sept 2007</p> <p>10. Menu of involvement developed by March 2008</p> <p>11. Contract tendered and let with panel established by March 2008</p> <p>12. Proposals agreed by Children's Centre Development Groups and Nurseries by December 2007</p> <p>13. Makaton training sessions held by March 2008</p>

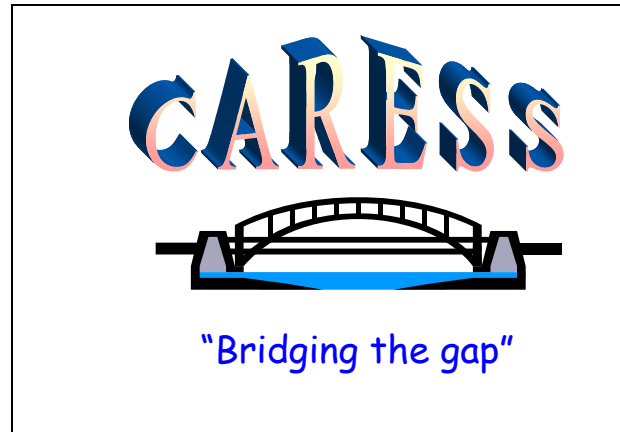
		<p>14. Focus on extending 5-13 engagement</p> <p>15. Increase opportunities for young people to identify and prioritise the crime and disorder issues that affect them</p>	<p>14. Forum established in line with Children's Fund priorities by March 2008</p> <p>15. Every Safer Neighbourhood Team to be tackling a crime and disorder priority identified by young people in their neighbourhood by July 2007</p>
<p>4.</p> <p>Co-ordination of children and youth engagement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relates to all 5 aims 	<p>16. Officers steering group established to share best practice and guidance</p> <p>17. Training courses for council and partner staff on how to successfully undertake children and youth engagement</p> <p>18. Produce policy guidance for involving children and young people in recruitment and selection</p> <p>19. Produce policy guidance for involving children and young people in commissioning</p>	<p>16. 1st meeting held 12th February 2007 and further three meetings held 2007/08</p> <p>17. Contract let to local community/voluntary organisation to run five sessions in 2007/08</p> <p>18. Guidance produced by September 07</p> <p>19. Guidance produced by September 2007</p>

		<p>20. Children and Youth Engagement's role in Neighbourhood management clarified</p> <p>21. Investigation of Intergenerational conflict in B&D</p> <p>22. Annual report evaluating progress of strategy to Children's Trust</p> <p>23. Produce Children and Young People Engagement Toolkit for officers</p>	<p>20. Research report for IDeA completed and actions evaluated by June 2007</p> <p>21. Pilot project introduced in one Neighbourhood Management intensive area by March 2008</p> <p>22. Baseline targets set to allow progress to be monitored in 2008/09</p> <p>23. Toolkit produced and launched by June 2007</p>
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