



One minute guide

Voice and Influence

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What does having a voice and influence mean?

Children, young people and their parents and carers have a right to be involved in decisions that affect their lives. Having a voice and influence means they feel that their voices are listened to, valued and can influence decisions and actions.

We use the term 'voice and influence' as children and young people have told us they want one definition, because there are so many different terms e.g. participation; empowerment; and active engagement, that it can be confusing.

Why are we doing it?

Leeds has a bold ambition to be the best city for children and young people – a [child friendly](#) city. At the heart of making this a reality is a commitment to working restoratively *with* children, young people, parents and carers so that their voices are at the heart of decisions that affect them.

There is strong evidence that working with children, young people, parents and carers wherever possible, instead of doing things *to* them or *for* them produces better outcomes and helps to build confidence and resilience.

Listening consistently to the voices of children, young people and families is central to the culture Leeds is working to create. This is evident in:

- Leeds's children and young people's [12 wishes](#) for what makes a child friendly city. Wish 3 is that 'Children and young people express their views, feel heard and are involved in decisions that affect their lives';
- The city's [Children and Young People's Plan](#). One of the five outcomes in the Plan is that 'All children and young people are active citizens who feel they have voice & influence'; and
- Article 12 of the [UN convention](#) on the rights of the child, which states that 'every child and young person has the right to express their views freely – about everything that affects them'.

Giving a voice and influence to children, young people, parents and carers in decision making demonstrates our commitment to them and acknowledges their right to shape their own future. It increases trust and can enable positive change, even in complex situations.

Practitioners can feel confident that decisions are informed by what children, young people, parents and carers say they want and need, which should lead to better quality services, saving money and using resources more effectively.

How can we give a voice and influence to children, young people and their families?

Working [restoratively](#) to listen and respond to the voices of children and young people is fundamental to front line-work that takes place every day across the city. Children, young people, parents and carers voices should be considered at all levels:

At an **individual level**: they are involved in making choices and influencing decisions about their own lives, for example co-producing their [education, health and care plan](#) or a child working with their teacher to agree their learning targets;

At a **family level**: all members of the family are involved in sharing their views, making choices and influencing decisions that affect their family. For example, a range of family members would be directly involved in developing an action plan at a [Family Group Conference](#);

At a **service level**: they are involved in shaping and influencing how services they use are planned, delivered and evaluated. Feedback is sought in a range of ways and routinely informs service improvement, for example by involving them in developing communication materials and consulting them on the type of activities provided; and

At a **strategic level**: they influence local or city wide priorities and agendas, for example in staff recruitment panels for senior leaders or representing their peers on a city wide or local forum where they make recommendations or advise decision makers.

What help is available?

The Voice, Influence and Change Team (VIC) can support services when planning a specific piece of work to get the views of children, young people and their parents and carers. It is important to be clear from the start what the purpose and outcomes of the work are, and to feedback afterwards to those who have taken part about how you acted on their views. It is also important to check from the outset that there are not existing consultations that would provide you with the same information.

The team can share and promote voice and influence good practice and opportunities across our network of children, young people, parents, carers, schools and youth voice groups within the city, for example young people who are LGBT, looked after, SEND, young carers, refugee and asylum seekers etc.

Key contacts and for more information

You can contact the Voice Influence Change Team at:

- Email: VIC@leeds.gov.uk
- [Youth voice website](#)
- [Parent carer voice website](#)
- Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/leedsyouthvoice/>
- Twitter: <https://twitter.com/leedsyouthvoice>