

**Children's Services Management Team (CMT)
for the Isle of Wight**

CMT Report/Briefing Template

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People attending for the item	Stephen Woodford

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2 Introduction

2.1 Quality Matters: Improvement Framework

The participation of children and young people in children's social care on the Isle of Wight is integral to improving social work practice and outcomes for children. Participation is a strength and is one of our 'windows in practice'. Participation is a key component of our Quality Matters: Improvement Framework and Quality Matters: Improvement Plan (QUIP).

2.2 Participation is two-fold.

Through participation, individual children gain confidence, build friendships, and learn how to have their own voice and to speak up about themselves and their lives. This helps build empowerment and resilience so that they can grow through and beyond their life experience so that their past does not have a negative impact on their future. The second aspect of participation is the impact that it has on improvements in social care practice and outcomes for all children.

2.3 Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the participation activities undertaken during 2020. The report provides an analysis of the achievements and lessons learnt through the involvement of children and young people in children's social care. This report provides case study examples at an individual level of participation (children and young people influencing decisions related to their care/ plan) and at service level participation (children and young people changing how the service is delivered for all current and future service users). The report includes detail about how participation adapted due to Coronavirus, team reports from the social care teams and the findings from the 'Your Care, Your Life' Bright spots survey. The report concludes with an outline of the planned activities for 2021.

3 Background, context, and key facts

Participation is the process of involving children and young people in decision and debate, regarding the services they use and how they are treated, both as an individual and collectively.

3.1 United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child

In 1989, the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child outlined what were to be seen as a set of standards and rights that every young person is

entitled to expect. Article 12 enshrines the right for children and young people to participate, and for that participation to be given due weight and consideration.

3.2 Pledges

In 2007, Government went further when requiring all authorities to have a 'Children in Care Council' (CiCC) and a Pledge to the Children in their Care. (Care Matters: Time for Change). On the Isle of Wight young people elected to rename their CiCC to HYPE – Hearing Young People's experiences, to better reflect its purpose and membership.

3.3 Participation Strategy

The Isle of Wight Council's Children's Services has a participation strategy which details the vision for a progressive, engaging, and inclusive approach to hearing the voice of the child, and for that to influence decisions that are made. In recent years, this has expanded beyond children in care and care leavers to include the views of any children and young people that are supported by children's services as well as their families.

The strategy from 2018 can be found in the appendix 10.1 and will be updated in 2021. On the Isle of Wight, a 'golden thread' of Participation is embedded in every level of the organisation:

- Strategically via the children and young people's plan and the corporate plan,
- Operationally via service plans and team plans, and
- Individually via workers, their best practice and explicitly within PDRs.

3.4 Participation leads

These are appointed to every team in the Children and Families branch of Children's Services. They aim to share best practice regarding participation and the systematic evidencing of the voice of the child. Each team collates a participation folder with categories for 'service participation': where children and young people influence service delivery, and 'personal participation', with examples of how the voice of the child has changed decisions regarding their own plan. There are also sections for evidencing direct work and the variety of ways children and young people are creatively engaged.

3.5 Participation events

These are coordinated on behalf of the service by the Rights and Participation Officer and each team has a participation lead that disseminates important

participation information and together work on specific participation activities and collation of data.

From March there was an amended approach to delivering Participation to respond to the restrictions regarding social contact. Initially some participation activities were postponed followed by online methods of engagement.

3.6 Corporate Parenting

This is effective, and members are supported to undertake the role of corporate parents for children in care and care leavers. The Corporate Parenting Board is practiced at engaging young people and debating the issues young people raise, resulting in direct actions and decisions as a response.

The Lead Member meets with the Director of Children's Services and senior managers on a monthly basis to examine performance across the service and strategic developments and key issues and issues. The Lead Member chairs the well-attended quarterly Corporate Parenting Board, with attendance from officers, managers, foster carers, young people, councillors, and partner agencies. The Chairman is continually mindful to ensure the agenda and meeting delivery is young people friendly. Members also hold the service to account through the Policy and Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services.

Young people both attend every meeting and provide agenda items for discussion and action, that stem from other avenues of participation such as the HYPE meetings.

4 Service Feedback and Recognition

4.1 Bright Spots

Coram voice have continued their relationship with the Isle of Wight, delivering the Bright Spots (your care, your life) survey in March 2020. As this was when Coronavirus hit and schools closed, the survey was extended and delivered with a different approach.

Coram continued their close work with the Isle of Wight, coproducing a feedback video with our Island Children to then be shared with young people and their Foster families.

5 Participation activity in 2020

The participation strategy outlines the activities (and their purpose) required each year. Below is detail of engagement across 2020 as well as some examples of the outcomes achieved.

5.1 HYPE

HYPE (Hearing Young People's Experiences) is a forum for children and young people in care and care leavers. The group meets monthly and discuss issues relating to the services they receive. Young people identify what is working well and areas for improvement, which are then discussed at the Corporate Parenting Board (local issues) and the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for children in care and care leavers (national issues).

In March, following lockdown restrictions and the APPG being cancelled, closer links were forged with the Office of the Children's Commissioner as an alternative means for our Island Children to have a voice on national issues.

In December the Island re-piloted a HYPE junior group for children aged 8-12. 6 children met and decided how they would like the group to run and committed to meeting monthly from then onward.

In 2020 there were 11 HYPE meetings with a total year's attendance of 68.

"Labels and Stigma" was an ongoing discussion point at multiple HYPE meetings to assist Children's Services understanding of the impact of terminology, and equally, scenarios where they are unnecessarily identified and singled out, such as being taken out of class.

Transport was also an issue that young people persistently raise as one that impacts on their lives and wellbeing, for example travelling to meet friends, take part in sports and attend meetings.

Outcomes:

- 3 new members joined HYPE, including 1 living in another authority but able to join the online meetings.
- HYPE Junior is established to give a voice to younger children in care, again including 4 that live in another authority.
- Terms such as 'Island Children' 'Foster parents' and 'going to see mum' have been accepted and adopted by the corporate parenting board in place of outdated and officious, identifying labels such as looked after child, carers and contact.

5.2 CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD (CPB)

The CPB is comprised of members and officers from across the spectrum of frontline services that support our children in care including education, health, and social care. Chaired by the lead member for children, the group meet quarterly, and the voice of young people is a standing agenda item to enable them to raise issues for discussion and action.

In 2020, there were four CPB meetings, with 6 children and young people attending. Participation at these meetings focused on transport, accommodation, and labels/ stigma, as well as keeping the board informed of other participation activity.

The CPB has created an action plan that is regularly reviewed and is based around the pledges made to children in care and care leavers. Actions and improvements are recorded against these issues there is a high level of scrutiny from councillors by incorporating the pledge into the running of the CPB in this manner.

Outcomes:

- Councillors and other corporate parents have virtually attended HYPE and Come Dine With Us, as well as in person for a socially distanced beach BBQ
- The CPB has consciously adapted its online format to ensure young people are comfortable and engaged resulting in new young people taking part and feeding back positively.
- Additional accommodation providers support our care leavers following a co-produced procurement tender.
- The IOW council has formally amended its terminology to acknowledge and avoid the stigma that could be caused by traditional labels.

5.3 ALL PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP (APPG)

The APPG is the means by which parliament listen to the views of children in care and care leavers from across the country. These have not occurred in 2020 due to Coronavirus restrictions and also following the General Elections in December 2019. The Isle of Wight subsequently explored alternative ways for their young people to be heard on a national level.

Through developing a working relationship with the Office of the Children's Commissioner for England, our HYPE group were offered two bespoke meeting with them, one with Anne Longfield directly. The IOW also extended an invite to Hampshire young people to join the meeting with Anne Longfield. Subsequently our Island young people fed into national debates regarding the impact of the Coronavirus lockdown on issues such as education and mental health.

Outcomes:

- Our Island young people had their views regarding lockdown restrictions advocated directly to government and national decision makers
- Our Island young people felt empowered by being involved in national debates and by the Children's Commissioner herself joining a HYPE meeting
- The Isle of Wight continues to lead the way in supporting other authorities to develop their participation opportunities

5.4 CORAM VOICE - 'Bright Spots' survey

'Bright Spots' is a survey, developed by Coram Voice and Bristol University. In 2020 the Isle of Wight took part in the Your Life, Your Care survey of Children in Care, with a response rate of 33%.

It is a survey co-created with young people to ask questions about quality of life, support from children's services and where they live. The results allow local authorities to hear a credible collective voice of its service users and uses statistical comparisons with other authorities, and with results from previous years. The Bright Spots survey is the largest single consultation each year and is one of the three main streams of information informing the Participation Action Plan (see appendix for examples), alongside HYPE and Have Your Say Week. It also identifies key areas for strength with the local authority, and areas of progression in relation to previous issues and actions.

One follow on project being explored in 2021 is to create a series of short videos to inform young people and stakeholders of survey findings as well as the service response to key issues.

Outcomes:

- Worker profiles have been developed and all staff will be asked to complete one and share with their families.
- The Independent Reviewing Service is updating its communications with young people to make them more strengths-based and child centred.
- Corporate Parenting Board discussed this issue and the virtual school committed to offering training to schools (supported by young people) to improve on this.
- With consultation with HYPE, the Life Story work completed with young people is being refreshed and increased.

A full report of the Bright Spots Survey is available in Appendix 10.2

5.5 YOUTH COUNCIL

The Youth Council is the means by which all young people are represented on the Isle of Wight. Young people are elected by other young people based on their manifesto and if a school/ town/ group of young people are not represented then the group can seek out or invite others to be co-opted onto the council.

Meetings are held monthly, with an average of 6-10 young people attending each meeting.

Actions:

- Youth Council continued to meet during lockdown (online) as well as develop its relationships with key services and decision makers on the Island.
- Youth Council awarded Ryde School with a YoVA in recognition of their student voice offer
- Youth Council successfully voted in a new chairman and other significant roles following some members leaving for university

Outcomes:

- Manifesto priorities related to Island Heritage, Mental Health and positive activities were acted on
- A closer relationship with full council being developed has allowed the voice of young people to better support the work of the council
- The lead member for children and young people delivered some bespoke chairperson training to both the chair and vice chair of the youth council

5.6 RECRUITMENT OF STAFF

Incorporated into the recruitment policy for Children's Services, and to recognise the specific skill set required to work with young people, the recruitment of all new officers within Children's Services involves young people.

In 2020, a total of 10 young people have supported 5 interview panels.

Outcomes:

- 5+ new workers were recruited to Children's Services, with all appointments matching the recommendations of young people.
- Young People developed their professional behaviour.
- Young people living off the Island were able to take part online, delivering a more inclusive participation offer.

5.7 HAVE YOUR SAY WEEK

Children's Services on the Isle of Wight use 'Have Your Say Days' as a means to informally consult with a wide group of children and young people. It is the means by which the largest and broadest group of service user's feedback about the service, including children in CIN, CP and LAC plans, care leavers, parents, carers and siblings.

Have Your Say Weeks are commonly used as a means to investigate and gain more qualitative feedback in relation to, for example, data collated via the Bright Spots survey.

In 2020 Have Your Say Week was postponed on multiple occasions and ultimately cancelled due to Coronavirus restrictions. Consultations with HYPE regarding Have Your Say Week planning will be saved and delivered in 2020.

To maintain a corporate parenting presence in participation activities, and to allow young people the opportunity to engage directly with senior corporate parents, managers and councillors were offered alternative opportunities such as the Corporate Parenting Board, Come Dine With Us and a beach barbeque to speak with the young people in attendance.

5.8 THE CELEBRATION EVENING

In 2020 there was no in-person Celebration event. The virtual school did organise other activities for young people to engage with and recognise the educational achievements of Our Island Children.

5.9 YOUNG INSPECTORS

The Young Inspectors Programme is the means by which Short Breaks activities are reviewed on the Isle of Wight. Children with disabilities and learning difficulties take part in the activities and then report back on the factors that young people have previously identified as important, such as how accessible the venue is or how friendly the staff are.

Following the Coronavirus lockdown in March 2020, further planned inspections were cancelled due to the nature of the activities being close in person and the vulnerability of many of the young inspectors.

One inspection did take place in 2020 prior to coronavirus lockdowns. 5 young inspectors attended a session at the Riverside Youth Club and awarded them a maximum three stars on key issues such as accessibility, staff friendliness and fun activities.

Outcomes:

- Positive and informed feedback was shared by young people to a short breaks' provider, including any minor issues they may wish to address.
- All young inspectors immensely enjoyed the activity with 2 indicating they would like to begin to regularly attend.
- All young inspectors seemed empowered by the responsibility of inspecting and scoring the provider.
- Parents positively fed back that they appreciated the opportunity for their children to try new activities that they may wish to continue.

5.10 COME DINE WITH US

Despite lockdown restrictions being present for the majority of 2020, Come Dine With Us has adapted and continued to offer opportunities for young people to come together and achieve personal growth. It supports preparation for independence, improves cooking, healthy eating and budgeting skills. Senior Corporate Parents welcomed the opportunity to informally engage with young people despite a global pandemic.

Eleven sessions were held in 2020 with a total of 52 young people attending, cooking a variety of meals including cheeky chicken, homemade burgers and casserole: all home-made, healthy and on a budget.

A celebratory Christmas 'Pizza and a Quiz' took place with regular attenders and feedback was gained for planning 2021.

"Come Dine With Us – Juniors" also delivered 2 sessions in 2020 for the 8-15 age range, to introduce them to cooking at an earlier age, making it fun and also building relationships with a younger group of children who will then go on to be involved in participation in future years. Feedback from carers was generally this would be more difficult to do for younger children at home and often with competing demands for their kitchen. Plans to reintroduce Come Dine With Us Juniors are in place for 2021.

Outcomes:

- The senior group continues to support existing care leavers to improve confidence, cooking, social and independence skills.
- Corporate Parents have continued to participate in sessions despite lockdown
- One of our Island Children was supported to explore their desire to become vegetarian.
- Multiple young people were able to take part despite living off the Island.
- Some Care Leavers have reflected that the cooking sessions are one of her main remaining forms of social interaction at this time.

5.11 OFFICE OF THE CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER (OCC)

Ann Longfield is the current Children's Commissioner for England. It is her duty to promote and protect the rights of children, especially the most vulnerable. The Isle of Wight has worked with the OCC over many years, completing surveys and disseminating their information. These links were further strengthened following the cancelling of the APPG and the need to seek alternative methods for the voice of Our Island Children to be heard at a national level.

Outcomes:

- Our Island young people had their views regarding lockdown restrictions advocated directly to government and national decision makers
- Our Island young people felt empowered by being involved in national debates and by the Children's Commissioner herself joining a HYPE meeting
- The Isle of Wight continues to lead the way in supporting other authorities to develop their participation opportunities

5.12 PARTICIPATION LEADS

As per the participation strategy, children's services have held regular meetings of participation leads to standardise the best practice from the more established teams within participation. Attendance has declined during lockdown as a result of the immediate needs to deliver a service during a pandemic have increased, and central events delivered by participation have been postponed and cancelled.

Collation of evidence via participation evidence folders has declined due to the lack of meetings and in person reminders and conversations but some teams have continued to maintain evidence of participation. Some notable teams have increased the amount of positive engagement and participation offered directly by their team and examples are in the appendices (10.4).

6 ANALYSIS

As with all frontline services, participation has been impacted by the global pandemic and resulting lockdown restrictions. Some projects have not been able to continue and others have continued in alternative formats such as online.

Positive alternatives have also been sought in response to the same restrictions with some notable success such as the involvement of young people that live off the Island being supported to participate and the attendance of Anne Longfield and her team at multiple HYPE meetings.

Long term co-production projects such as the procurement of increased and more diverse accommodation for care leavers has continued to come to fruition. Multiple new providers, having met with care leavers, completed applications including young people's questions and being scored by service users, now offer additional capacity and quality accommodation and support for our care leavers.

Appendix 10.6 collates many of the examples where the active participation offer on the Isle of Wight has led to improved outcomes for our Island Children and care experienced adults.

7 OFSTED: TOWARD OUTSTANDING

Isle of Wight Children's Services is Ofsted rated as Good (2018) and aspects of Participation were highlighted as key strengths. In the continued journey to a rating of outstanding, Participation will naturally be a key factor in that success.

'HYPE is an active and influential part of the corporate parenting board.'

'Care leavers have been actively involved in improving service delivery, such as through the tendering process for the new supported housing pathway.'

'These popular and vibrant events are excellent opportunities for children in care to spend enjoyable time with each other and with managers, council members, social workers and foster carers.'

The Participation Action Plan 2020 (appendix 10.5) outlines the actions the service has committing to, in relation to the feedback young people have shared in a variety of ways. This action plan plays a key role in ensuring that the voice of young people is not only listened to but explicitly acted on.

In addition to the participation action plan there are also innovations the service can adopt in the journey to Outstanding, listed below:

- Continue, and develop, the use of visual media as a means to engage young people and promote participation, as exemplified by the education

video and the Have Your Say Week video and planned for the Bright Spots feedback video.

- Work with the Transformation team to develop the opportunities for young people to access information online and share their views.

8 CONCLUSION

Participation in Children's Services continues to be a key strength, recognised as such by other local authorities and by Ofsted. Senior Corporate Parents and the children and families that are supported by the service have fed back their benefits from service-wide events in previous years and their hopes that they resume in 2021. The voice of children and young people continues to inform the annual participation action plan to further impact on improvements in social work practice and outcomes for children and young people. In summary:

Isle of Wight Children's Services has gained national recognition for the standard and diversity of their participation offer and continues to seek new and exciting ways for Our Island Children to have a voice, such as the attendance of Anne Longfield and her team at multiple HYPE meetings.

Projects such as 'Come Dine With Us', have adapted, offering a valued opportunity for care leavers to socialise online and maintain relationships with the service. It has also continued to offer a key opportunity for senior corporate parents to informally engage our care leavers.

Children's Services and the whole IOW Council are able to evidence well that the voice of young people has influenced service improvement and delivery. Participation has adapted to be even more inclusive for new young people to participate from a distance.

The Corporate Parenting Board can evidence its strong commitment to listening to young people and acting on their recommendations and the issues they raise.

9 RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Corporate Parenting Board notes this 2020 Participation Annual Report.

10 APPENDICES

10.1 The IOW Participation Strategy



Paper 3 - IOW
Participation Strategy

10.2 The Your Life, After Care Bright Spots Survey.



Isle of Wight YLYC
report 2020.pdf

10.3 Youth Council Priorities



YC Priorities
2019.pdf

10.4 Team Annual Reports



CIC Participation
report 2020.docx



Fostering
Participation report 20

10.5 Participation Action Plan 2020



Participation Action
Plan 2020 end.xlsx

10.6 Participation examples – ‘You Said, We Did’ format



Participation 2020
'you said we did'.docx

End.