

# Guide for Effective Consultation with Children and Young People



**Stockton-on-Tees**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this guide, reference to 'young people' covers children and young people

## Introduction

You may question why we need a guide for consulting children and young people . It is important that all residents of Stockton-on-Tees have the opportunity to be involved in decision-making and service improvements through consultation. This includes young people - they are residents and service users too. Young people can usually be defined as people under the age of 18 but many of our services to young people include 18, 19 and even up to 24 year olds. The Children's Trust legislation suggests young people are up to the age of 19.

This guide is intended to give you practical advice and help you effectively consult young people. It should help you if you want to:

- make your consultation accessible to young people,
- target consultation specifically at young people, or
- tap into existing corporate resources.

Young people know what they want and we can only make well-informed decisions if we know what their views are!

There are a number of issues to consider in consulting young people but before you read any further it is worth outlining some of the major points:

- A common mistake is to try to transfer consultation with adults to young people; don't assume this will work. Young people are a different audience, so you must offer a different approach.
- It is also essential that the consultation is genuine and can effect change. Young people will not get any value from being used to 'tick a box' or 'rubber stamp' a decision, and neither will you.
- Remember, young people are diverse. They are not a homogenous group.

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## Why consult children?

### Our decisions impact on young people

- This impact may be immediate or it may impact on them in the future.
- Decisions made today about the environment, the local economy, or leisure and education facilities, for example, will leave a legacy for future generations.
- Young people may have a different perspective to adult residents. Services intended to meet the needs of young people will be more effective if you get their views, rather than base decisions solely on the views of adults.

### Young people should be treated seriously

- Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that young people have a right to be involved in decisions that affect them.
- The main principle of Article 12 is about respecting and acting upon young people's opinions.
- It is in your interest to take the views of young people seriously, to actively seek them out and act where appropriate on consultation findings.
- Young people's views are equally as valid as the views of adults.

### Young people are our future

- Involving young people from an early age will benefit them and society as a whole, promoting a healthy democracy and good citizenship.
- Giving the message to people early that they can communicate with the Council, to get the services they want and need, will help maintain positive relations between the Council and the community.
- This will hopefully mean that, as adults, they will be more empowered to participate in consultation and decision-making and have a better perception of the Council and its aims.
- This will also help young people gain confidence and be more motivated to get involved in their community. It will give them life skills that will help prepare them for the world of work.

### We must consult

In addition to the reasons why we should consult with young people there are some very good reasons why we must consult with them.

- Effective consultation is increasingly something that Council and service performance is judged upon; it is an important feature in the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA).
- The Government's Green Paper 'Every Child Matters' and the subsequent Children Act 2004 emphasise the provision of quality services for young people. To ensure all young people can be healthy, safe, enjoy and achieve, achieve economic well-being and make a positive contribution, it is imperative that young people have a real say in the decisions that affect them.
- Stockton-on-Tees has a PIC (Participation, Involvement and Consultation) Network that represents services across Stockton-on-Tees to ensure many organisations work to involve young people.
- Stockton-on-Tees also has a Children's Trust to help improve the services that affect the everyday lives of young people through actively involving young people and the adults who support them. All services, organisations and individuals who work with young people are part of it.
- As mentioned above, Article 12 of the UN Convention on the rights of the child states we must.

## Corporate approach to consulting young people

The Research and Consultation Team can provide you with assistance and advice on targeting audiences, planning or designing effective consultation exercises. They also coordinate Stockton's residents' panels.

### Youth Viewpoint

- Youth Viewpoint is the residents' panel in Stockton-on-Tees for young people. Youth Viewpoint has been running since 2002 and has over 500 members between the age of 8-18.
- Members receive regular questionnaires about a variety of issues relating to their community and council services. Youth Viewpoint is an important resource available for officers across the Council to use.

### Why use Youth Viewpoint?

There are a number of reasons why it is advantageous for you to utilise Youth Viewpoint:

- You don't need to draw your own sample. Youth Viewpoint already has members who are happy to be consulted. New members are constantly being recruited to the panel.
- Legal issues over consent have already been dealt with.
- Youth Viewpoint has members from a range of areas, ages, and cultures to give their views. This means you can reach a wide range of young people.
- Information held on panel members allows samples to be drawn from particular wards, age groups etc.
- By using Youth Viewpoint you are likely to get a better response rate and you will not be in danger of over-consulting a community by approaching them yourself.
- Youth Viewpoint members receive a regular newsletter which feeds back what has happened as a result of the consultation. You can feed back your results simply by letting the Research and Consultation Team know what you have been doing since the consultation. (This will be a requirement of using the panel).
- The Research and Consultation Team have experience in consulting young people and will help you write suitable questions to get the information you need.
- You can programme your consultation in simply by using the Consultation Plan (see below for information on this).
- It is a very cheap way of consulting.
- Youth Viewpoint is part of the PIC Network which links to a wide range of young people's services and organisations.

### The Consultation Plan (CP)

- It is completely right that services consult young people; however this means that more people are trying to contact them. As a result it is absolutely essential that we properly co-ordinate services to avoid consultation fatigue.
- All consultation activities should be entered into the plan, because it is used by the Research and Consultation Team to plan their service and coordinate resident panel activities.
- If you want to use Youth Viewpoint the Research and Consultation Team will contact you when the survey is coming up. If you do not want to use any of the panels it is still important to use the CP to make sure consultation is better coordinated and to avoid unnecessary expense and consultation fatigue.
- This information is also shared with the PIC Network so we can co-ordinate our approach.
- Finally, the CP helps the Research and Consultation Team to plan their support.

## Planning your consultation with young people

### Beginning the process

- At the beginning of the consultation process, make sure the consultation will benefit young people. You should:
  - ◆ consider what the information is for,
  - ◆ think about what you can do with the information,
  - ◆ consider how you will feed back what you have done post consultation,
  - ◆ set out the process to young people at the outset so their expectations are appropriately managed,
  - ◆ check what other consultation is going on within the authority, to avoid repeating similar consultations and to share resources if appropriate.

### Accessing Young People

- You can access young people through Youth Viewpoint, though this is only really appropriate if you want a general view. You may need to use other mechanisms to access specific or excluded groups.
- There are a number of services and organisations that work with young people on a daily basis; some Council but many other organisations, including the voluntary sector. Many organisations work with marginalised groups of young people and know what support needs individuals have. It is important to be proactive in speaking to these groups. The PIC Network has contacts with many of these groups and you can approach them if you want to contact such organisations (see appendix 3).
- The Youth Empowerment section of the Council helps young people to become more involved in the decision making process. It is also the base for the Stockton Youth Assembly which consists of two young people from each secondary school/college with additional members from youth clubs and other youth related organisations. It meets monthly and organises sub-groups to work on projects.
- Schools can be good contacts but not all schools will want, or be able, to get involved. If you think you want to approach schools, talk to the PIC Network about how you can contact them. They will advise you how to fit your consultation into their curriculum and timescales.
- It helps to make sure young people are aware of the benefits of them being involved, even if they seem long term. If there are no benefits to young people being involved, it probably isn't appropriate to consult.

### Managing expectations

- It is important to make sure young people can have:
  - ◆ as much contact with decision makers as possible,
  - ◆ clear explanation of what can be achieved and the level of contribution their input will have,
  - ◆ explanation of how decisions will be made,
  - ◆ and honesty and realism about what can be achieved. If expectations are too high from the outset people will be disillusioned with the results and there will be reluctance to be involved in future consultations.

## **Timing**

- There are specific times when consulting young people is more effective than others. You may think it is a good idea to consult them during the school holidays, when they have more free time. Young people are not enthusiastic about coming along to events in this period, neither is it a good idea to consult them at the weekend.
- During term time young people are most willing to attend events immediately after school. This also helps parents and carers who may be collecting them.

## **Methodology**

- If possible, involve young people at the set up stage. If they designed it, it is more likely that it will fit their needs.
- You may need to think a little more innovatively to help engage young people. The more you can encourage young people to interact, the more likely they are to engage in stimulating discussion. This might mean that you need extra materials and resources for creative consultation.
- Traditional methods of consultation, such as questionnaires and focus groups work if you address them in the right way. For example, make questionnaires more fun and visual and focus groups can involve more group activities, such as sticking ideas on posters.
- It is not necessary to stick to these traditional approaches; you can explore consultation through music, workshops, quizzes and art. This might be a good approach when the more usual methods of communication might prove challenging for those involved e.g. for young people with literacy or mobility difficulties.

## **Budgets**

- If extra resources are needed this may require more financial commitment.
- Budget for any incentives you plan to offer.
- For questionnaires, you will need to think about costs relating to design, printing, posting, packing, data entry and data analysis.
- For events or meetings you will need to consider room hire and catering.

## **Finally**

- Make sure you are prepared to manage the unexpected. If you gain information you weren't expecting or didn't want, you must still deal with it.

## Ethical and legal considerations

There are a number of ethical issues to consider in any social research; however these become especially relevant when consulting young people. These issues are important for the safety of young people and also to protect yourself.

### Criminal Records Bureau

- Any person intending to work with young people, or who may access confidential information, should obtain a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check. The CRB check shows you are suitable to work with young people. This is a simple procedure and can be arranged through Human Resources.

### Consent

- Inform all participants about the intentions of the research before consenting to be a part of it.
- If the participants are under the age of sixteen get consent from a parent or guardian.
- If you already have consent for young people to be part of a scheme, such as Youth Viewpoint, still get permission for them to attend particular events.
- The Market Research Society states that permission should be sought from a 'responsible adult'. This means that if, for example, you are conducting your consultation within a school the responsible adult would be the teacher.
- Make sure the young person is willing to take part in the consultation too.
- If you are planning to take photos speak to legal services to check your position, as there are strict guidelines you must adhere to.

### Right to withdraw

- Both the young person and the responsible adult should be aware that they are not obliged to take part in anything or answer anything that they don't want to.
- It is important that the participants are aware they can withdraw from the research at any time.

### Sensitivity

- Ethical guidelines state that we should not adversely affect the physical and emotional well-being of consultees. This may sound obvious but some topics may be very sensitive to some young people.
- It is very easy to stumble on an emotional or sensitive issue so you must be more careful in tackling sensitive issues.
- Distinguish what is appropriate for particular age groups. For example, young children may be frightened or may not have the knowledge to fill in something that teenagers may be able to give a view on.
- Be aware this may be more difficult to control on Internet based research, as you may not be able to assess age before they take part.

### Data Security

- You must keep data secure.
- If a young person can be identified from your data, this could potentially place them at risk of harm.
- It is also essential to satisfy the requirements of the Data Protection Act. This means keeping hard copy data under lock and key and password protecting electronic data. If you do breach the Data Protection Act, you could be subject to a personal fine.

### Personal Security

- Do not spend time alone with young people. It is important to protect yourself from possible allegations and one of the safest ways is to work where other people are around.
- Also take care not to make physical contact with young people.

## Carrying out your consultation

See Appendix 2

### Starting out

- Make sure the consultation is people and not data focussed. Yes, you need some information and data from the consultation but the whole point of it should be to improve services to young people. Therefore it is the people involved that are the most important part of the process.
- Consider whether you are the most appropriate person to facilitate the process, or whether you need to rely on other people's expertise. If in doubt call the Research and Consultation Team.

### Planning

- Balance a fun and enjoyable process with ensuring young people are aware the process is important and their views are being taken seriously.

### Venues

- Ensure venues are safe and give the right message to young people.
- The venue must be appropriate to the local context and to young people; for example, if the consultation is solely on a Billingham issue, don't hold the event in Stockton. Think about whether the venues are young people friendly such as youth clubs and leisure centres.
- Ensure venues are accessible for disabled people at all times, not only when you are expecting a person with a disability to attend. If you need more general advice about making sure venues are accessible see the Guide to Consulting People with Disabilities and Sensory Loss.

### Incentives

- It is essential that incentives provided for young people are safe and would be acceptable to parents. This can include food and refreshments.
- Make every effort to find out about any food allergies or religious restrictions on what can be consumed. Provide appropriate food to ensure young people are able to avoid anything that would make them ill or contravene their religion.
- It is wise to make sure food will appeal to young people, but beware of too much sugar or food colouring!
- As a minimum provide travel expenses. It may also be a good idea to think of giving travel expenses to get to the event beforehand to prevent the disincentive of having to pay and be reimbursed. Attendance allowances can also be considered. However, there is a risk that people won't come, despite having been given the expenses.
- Beware that some young people, presented with a questionnaire with an incentive may be tempted to tick anything to get the incentive. If there is an opportunity to have young people work through the questionnaire with youth workers, support workers etc. this can help ensure they are giving it real consideration.

### Timescales

- Tell young people about the timescales from the outset, and keep them informed if they change to help keep them on board.
- Ensure you give young people adequate notice to attend meetings and to complete questionnaires.
- You should ideally invite people to events three weeks in advance and you should leave three weeks for people to respond to questionnaires.
- Timescales for consultation are often underestimated. Ensure you leave adequate time to plan and conduct the consultation effectively and if you need advice, contact the Research and Consultation Team.

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### **Carrying out**

- Ensure language is simple English and jargon free but not patronising. For example young people don't want to be referred to as kids and definitely not 'kidz'.
- Young people want to be treated as valued partners, not patronised.
- Be straightforward and direct and make sure you find the right tone to ensure young people know their views are genuinely valued.

### **Methods**

- There is no one right way of involving young people; in fact it may be the case that no one method will suffice for one piece of consultation, different approaches may need to be tried.
- Local situations and contexts must always be considered.
- If at all possible start with young people's agendas, rather than react to adult agendas.
- Make sure sessions aren't too long; if possible restrict them to one hour.
- Icebreakers are useful. eg. Paper Roll ( each person helps themselves to some toilet paper then they are told they must tell one thing about themselves for every sheet they have) or Two Truths and a Lie (everyone tells three facts and the others guess which is the lie). There are many examples you can use, it will work best if you can tailor them to your session.
- Where possible encourage young people to take ownership of the consultation process.
- Ask participants to comment on how the consultation worked to allow improvement of future consultations.

## After the event

- Feedback must be timely. Adults become disillusioned and disinterested if feedback is a long time after an event, but this is even more so with young people.
- Ensure the feedback is outcome focussed, do not just repeat what has been said.
- If a change can't be made as a result of what they have said, do not avoid feeding back but explain why the changes cannot be made.
- If you can demonstrate evidence of change as a result of the consultation make sure the message gets back so that they know their involvement has been worthwhile and they are more likely to get involved again in the future.
- Ask young people how they would like you to feedback them.
- Local newsletters, meetings and personal feedback are all acceptable ways of feeding back but the most important thing is that it is fast, fair and simple.

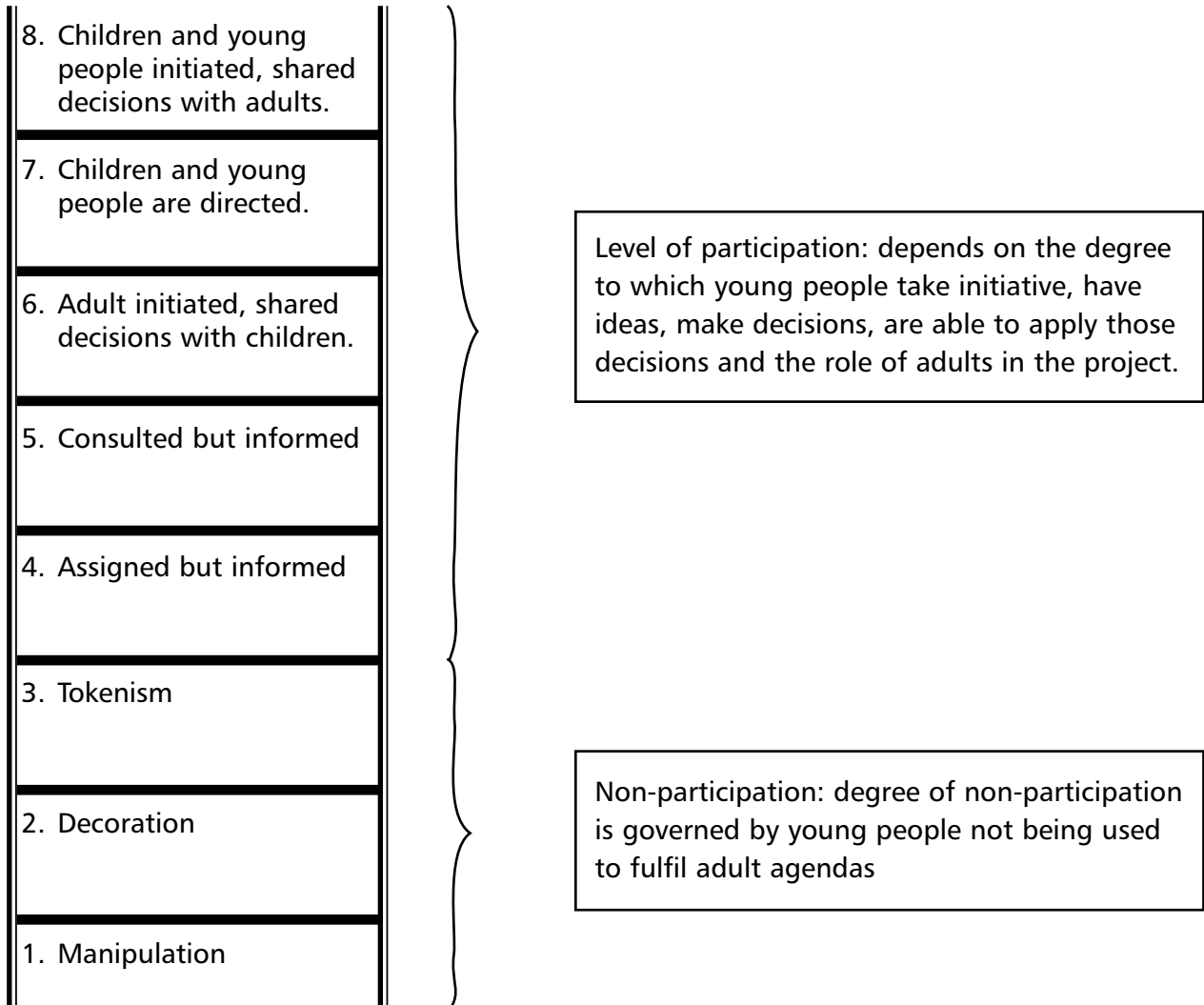
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## Conclusion

- It is important to recognise that if we want to make sure young people talk to us again and keep an ongoing process of engagement we need to take the points above into our everyday practices.
- If we rush into consultation without committing sufficient time and resources to the process we may cause more damage than good. Therefore it is essential to thoroughly plan, resource and act upon consultation.
- Appendix 1 shows how we should be working towards better participation with children and young people.

## Appendix 1

Ladder of Participation. Hart, R (1992) Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship. Innocenti Essays No 4. Florence: UNICEF



## Appendix 2

There are a number of issues you need to consider when consulting with young people. Use the grid below to help shape your plans.

Planning	Comments
<p><b>Objectives</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you written your objectives?</li> <li>• Are they clear, specific and realistic?</li> <li>• Do the methods, tools and techniques that you are planning to use allow you to achieve the objectives?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Participants</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How many young people are you aiming to consult with?</li> <li>• What age group are you targeting?</li> <li>• Are you targeting a specific group of young people?</li> <li>• Have you decided how to access them?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Methods/ resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you decided on the approach/methods you are going to use?</li> <li>• Do you have a rationale for the approach and methods you are going to use?</li> <li>• Have you decided how the information is going to be recorded?</li> <li>• Will the young people you are consulting need any preparation material?</li> <li>• Are you well prepared in terms of the resources needed?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>General</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you drawn out a timeline for the consultation (include finish dates for each stage)?</li> <li>• Have you planned how you are going to give feedback to the young people who participate?</li> <li>• Have you considered what the potential problems might be?</li> <li>• How do you plan to present the information once the consultation has taken place?</li> <li>• Have you decided on the roles of each person involved?</li> </ul>	

Planning	Comments
<b>Consent</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you have permission from the young person and any responsible adult to consult?</li> </ul>	
<b>Safety</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are you or the people carrying out the consultation police checked (CRB)?</li> <li>• Is the venue safe?</li> <li>• Do you need to arrange transport?</li> <li>• Do you know the transport arrangements of the young people in your care?</li> </ul>	
<b>Access</b> Have you got: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessible and welcoming buildings?</li> <li>• Accessible times?</li> <li>• Accessible activities?</li> </ul>	
<b>Rewards</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you have a thank you for their involvement?</li> <li>• If so, are they safe and acceptable?</li> </ul>	
<b>Feedback</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will they know when their involvement has resulted in change?</li> <li>• Who will tell them, when, how?</li> </ul>	

Madden, Sarah (2001) Re: action Consultation Toolkit: A Practical Toolkit for Consulting with Children and Young People on Policy Issues. P42. Save the Children: Scotland.

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## Appendix 3

### PIC Network Organisations

You can find out more about the PIC network, including contacts at [www.gov.uk/citizenservices/listcyp/picnetworknew](http://www.gov.uk/citizenservices/listcyp/picnetworknew). The PIC network is growing daily so all of the current members may not be listed here.

- Asylum Support Team
- Behaviour and Educational Support Team (Children, Education and Social Care)
- Extended Schools
- Care For Your Area
- Children's Rights (Children, Education and Social Care)
- Community Campus Youth Project
- Youth and Leaving Care Service (Children, Education and Social Care)
- Link Advice, Special Educational Needs and Inclusion (Children, Education and SocialCare)
- Connexions
- Corner House Youth Project
- Democractic Services
- (DISC) STASH (young people's drug project - under 19s)
- Drug Action Team
- Eastern Ravens Trust
- Housing Options
- Housing Services
- Maze Project
- Traveller Education Consortium
- Neighbourhood Renewal Team
- North Tees PCT (Young People's Health, Transitional Care and Public Involvement)

- Parents Against Narcotics in the Community
- Parkfield Youth Forum
- Parkfield & Mill Lane Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder
- Planning Services (Development & Neighbourhood Services)
- Research and Consultation Team (Policy, Performance and Communications)
- Stockton and District Advice and Information Service (Stockton CAB)
- Stockton Parent Support
- Stockton Residents and Community Groups Association
- Stockton Youth Assembly
- Stockton Youth Offending Service
- Sure Start
- Tees Valley Community Church
- The Five Lamps Organisation
- Young Persons Drug and Alcohol Service
- Youth Service – Youth Inclusion, Youth Empowerment, Citizenship and Democracy (Children, Education and Social Care)

