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**Manchester City Council  
Report for Resolution**

**Report to:** Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee – 31 January 2017

**Subject:** Participation and Engagement Strategy

**Report of:** Head of Youth Strategy and Head of Quality Assurance for Safeguarding

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**Summary**

The engagement of children and young people continues to be a priority for the City Council. This report outlines the wide range of engagement activities that children and young people are involved in across the city including their involvement in plans and review for them. It also provides an update on the Children's Rights Service delivered by Coram Voice. The final section summarises the work that is underway to refresh the children and young people's engagement strategy, Our City Our Say, which presents a clear vision and strategic plan to increase the participation and influence of children and young people in the decisions that impact on their lives and the communities in which they live.

**Recommendations**

Note contents of the report.

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**Wards Affected:** All

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**Contact Officers:**

Name: Elaine Morrison  
Position: Head of Youth Strategy  
Telephone: 0161 234 1984  
Email: e.morrison@manchester.gov.uk

Name: Linda Evans  
Position: Head of Quality Assurance for Safeguarding  
Telephone: 0161 234 4960  
Email: L.Evans1@manchester.gov.uk

**Background documents (available for public inspection):**

Participation and Engagement activities and plan reflect the key principles and priorities of the following strategies:  
Our Manchester Strategy 2015 - 2025  
Children and Young People's Plan 2016 - 2020 'Our City, Our Children'

Valuing Young People Strategy 2013 - 2018.

In addition this report is in line with priorities outlined in the Children's Service Improvement Plan.

## 1.0 Engagement Update

- 1.1 The Manchester Youth Council have undertaken a review of their structure and have moved to a membership model to build stronger links with other youth led forums, school and college councils, youth groups and leadership programmes. The new model was launched 12 months ago at an event attended by over 150 young people. To date 65 groups have affiliated to the Manchester Youth Council including 23 school and college councils and 35 youth groups. A small group of young people elected from the membership called 'The Hive' oversee and co-ordinate the programme of activities and campaigns and organise three membership sittings a year in Council Chambers. They have also introduced a new tier for older young people 17 - 24 called the Leaders Panel who have led their own campaigns and advise and mentor the 'Hive'.
- 1.2 A number of other youth forums are affiliated to the Manchester Youth Council including the Young Carers Forum, The Coalition of Disabled Young people, the Proud Trust (LGBTQ) and 42<sup>nd</sup> Street. All of these forums have places on the Hive to ensure the hive is diverse enough to represent a wide cross-section of young people views and opinions.
- 1.3 Manchester Youth Council has continued to be active at a regional and national level. Representatives on the North West Youth Fora (the umbrella organisation that brings together Youth Councils from across the Region) have contributed to the development of a Greater Manchester Assembly to ensure that young people have a voice in the devolution plans.
- 1.4 An important event in the Youth Council Calendar is the Make Your Mark Campaign which is a national run ballot organised by the British Youth Council. Members of the UK Youth Parliament are invited to submit requests about Campaigns they wish to see on the ballot paper. For the third year running Manchester Youth Council increased the numbers of young people participating in the Make Your Mark campaign. Manchester achieved the fourth highest turnout 64.4% of young people between the ages of 11 and 17 years and had the third highest number of ballots 25,406. The top five issues that young people from Manchester chose as lead campaign topics were:
- a) **Tackling racism and religious discrimination, particularly against people who are Muslim or Jewish.** All young people should work together to combat racism and other forms of discrimination, and ensure we know the dangers of such hatred.
  - b) **Transport.** Make public transport cheaper, better and accessible for all.
  - c) **A Curriculum to prepare us for life.** Schools should cover topics like Finance, sex and relationship education and politics.
  - d) **Votes at 16.** Give 16 and 17 year olds the right to vote in all elections/referendums.
  - e) **Stop cuts that affect the NHS.** Funding that affects the NHS shouldn't be cut. We must keep up vital services to protect young people.

- 1.5 The Manchester Youth Council Leaders panel was instrumental in developing Manchester's bid to be the European Youth capital for 2019. Manchester was one of the five cities shortlisted for the award. Members of the Manchester Youth Council presented a paper to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee in July 2016 outlining the content of the bid.

The work of the Youth Council was acknowledged by the European Youth Forum who is the awarding body. Although Manchester was not successful in winning the award the bidding process has contributed to strengthening the voice of young people and the learning from this will be used to influence future plans for both the Youth Council and the partners who supported the bid.

## **2.0 LAC and Care Leavers Engagement**

- 2.1 It is a statutory requirement that all Local Authorities have Children in Care Council (CiCC). Manchester's CiCC is made up of 2 separate groups - 'The Group' for young people aged 11 - 17 which is supported by Manchester City Council's Engagement Team meet every two weeks and The Change Group (Care Leavers Group, aged 18+) that is supported by Barnardo's and meets every week.
- 2.2 Both groups contributed to the development and design of the 'Promise', Manchester's version of a Corporate Parenting Pledge to children and young people who are looked after and care leavers. Children and young people have also been involved in the recruitment of Social Work and Safeguarding manager appointments.
- 2.3 Children and young people have identified a number of areas for improvement including better arrangements for receiving leisure passes, them having access to Safe boxes and them needing to have better understanding of their rights and entitlements. These issues have been put forward to service leads and the Corporate Parenting Panel their ideas about how these improvements can be implemented. In response we have worked with leisure services to make sure leisure passes are distributed in a more timely way so children and young people get maximum benefit from them, we have put a protocol in place that ensures all young people are offered a Safe box that they can keep private items in and we have developed a web page on the Council website that outlines rights and entitlements and our housing lead has delivered presentations to The Change Group.
- 2.4 The Group members have organised five Open Air Cafés creating an open environment and delivering several fun and interactive activities. The aim of the Open Air Cafés is to engage with and seek the views of a wider group of looked after children and care leavers about their care experience, the changes they would like to see and to recruit more young people to the Group. Although the number have been lower than we had hoped the ideas and views captured have enabled us to identify future projects and campaigns that The Group and The Change Group can lead e.g. at the October 2016 Open Air Café young people told us they were concerned about how well they are

prepared for the transition to leaving care and they will be leading a discussion at the Corporate Parenting Panel about this.

- 2.5 A Voice and Influence sub group has been established to oversee priorities of the Looked After Children and Care Leavers Strategy. Key partners responsible for delivering the Strategy and young people meet on a monthly basis to monitor progress, share practice and develop collaborative ways to improve the engagement children and young people. The Voice and Influence sub group is chaired by a Care Leaver which ensures a strong focus on the voice and influence of children and young people. Each of the other Strategy sub groups reports into the Voice and Influence Sub Group to inform them of their priorities and actions, how they are taking into account the voice and influence of children and young people and also how they are engaging children and young people in their work.
- 2.6 All Service Areas across Children's Services and the Virtual School (supporting educational achievement of Looked After Children) have identified lead members of staff to look at ways to improve the quality of engagement across the workforce by embedding best practice. The adoption of a strengths based model of practice has enabled children and young people to have a more central role in reviewing and shaping plans for their future. This approach has led to a number of improvements including a greater engagement of LAC Children and Care Leavers in their Personal Education Plans, LAC Reviews and SEND children and young people in their Education and Health Care Plans. Work is underway to systematically evaluate the impact this having on services and the outcomes for individual children and young people.

### **3.0 MCC cross-directorate activity**

- 3.1 The City Council in line with the 'Our Manchester' strategy is making real strides to improve the engagement of children and young people in developments across the Council. In the last year children and young people have been consulted about a number of new initiatives and strategies including Parks and Green Spaces, Carbon Reduction, The Children and Young People's Plan, budget options and the Family Poverty Strategy. Representatives from the Manchester Youth Council are members of the Leaders Forum and were instrumental in shaping the vision for 'Our Manchester' for example young people highlighted the need for affordable transport and more green spaces across the City.
- 3.2 Children and young people are also becoming more involved in influencing Commissioning plans and decisions including the commissioning of the Children's Rights Service. They have also been active in the recruitment of senior positions across directorates and two members of the Manchester Youth Council took part in the stakeholder panel that contributed to the selection of the new Chief Executive. The Equalities Team are also looking at ways to increase the engagement of young people in achieving their priorities and are building links with the Youth Forums who represent the views of minority and interest groups.

3.3 Although significant progress has been made across the Council there is still a need to evidence the difference that the engagement of children and young people is having on Manchester City Council's strategic priorities and outcomes for children and young people and to develop a more systematic and sustainable approach to embedding into the work of all directorates. An area for development is the role of children and young people in the quality assurance of services they receive. Ideas to take this forward are being developed via Strategic leads for Participation and Engagement.

#### **4.0 Partners**

4.1 There is also increasing evidence that children and young people are engaged and participating in a wide range of services across the public and voluntary sectors. It is common practice for primary and secondary schools and colleges to have school / student councils and leadership projects that are informing all aspects of the education offer. Children and young people are also having a greater say in the play and youth services they attend and there are some excellent examples of youth providers working with young people to campaign or raise issues with decision-makers through a range of creative methods. For example Manchester Young Lives have produced a film aimed at promoting health relationships to support the delivery of the Domestic Violence awareness raising.

4.2 Housing Providers, GMP and Health Services are also creating forums and opportunities to consult with young people on the services they provide or specific issues that have a direct impact on the lives of children and young people at a community level.

4.3 There are also several national Leadership programmes delivering a range of opportunities for young people in developing their leadership potential to run their own social action projects. RECLAIM and UpRising are two examples of national organisations delivering in Manchester. These programmes provide progression routes for young people who have a real interest in becoming active citizens and leading change in their communities. Debate Mate is another national initiative which is growing in schools across Manchester. Debate mate is a twelve week extra curricular debating programme delivered by Manchester Students.

#### **5.0 Children's Rights Service**

5.1 Coram Voice has delivered our Children's Rights Services since the 1<sup>st</sup> November 2015. Coram Voice is a national organisation formally known as Voice for the Child in Care. This organisation was established in 1975 and they currently deliver over 50 advocacy contracts for Local Authorities, NHS, DfE, private and voluntary agencies. Coram Voice also manages the Department for Education's national advocacy helpline (since 2012).

Coram Voice is providing advocacy services to children and young people look after, care leavers and those subject to child protection plans. We receive

monthly, quarterly and annual reports that outline the performance, impact and outcomes of the service delivery. During Quarter 3 (October - December 2016), children and young people were supported to address 204 issues. Coram Voice has demonstrated effective challenge on behalf of children and young people about matters that are important to them.

82 children and young people were open to the advocacy service in Quarter 3; 31 (37.8%) of these children and young people were living outside of Manchester. This demonstrates that the services offered by Coram Voice are reaching all children and young people.

44 (53.6%) of children and young people self-referred for advocacy services this demonstrates that children and young people have good awareness of the service and have the confidence to contact the service themselves.

Coram Voice also delivers an Independent Visiting Service on our behalf. The Children Act 1989 introduced the role of Independent Visitors for looked after children; their task is to visit, advise and befriend the child. In November 2016 Coram Voice reported. In November 2016 there were 43 registered Independent Visitors and 21 active matches. Whilst there were 16 young people waiting or in the process of being matched, active recruitment of Independent Visitors is ongoing and there are Independent Visitors in induction and the early stages of being matched.

- 5.2 Early 2017 we will be working with Coram Voice and the University of Bristol who have worked together, thanks to funding from the Hadley Trust, on the 'Bright Spots' programme, which aims to improve the care experience and well-being of children in care and care leavers by identifying and promoting 'bright spots' - the practices that have a positive influence on children and young people's wellbeing.

This is a good opportunity for us to improve looked after children's care experience and we recognise that we had to firstly identify what children and young people believed this was and a way to measure it. To do this a survey will be conducted, 'Your Life, Your Care', that measures the quality of their care experience and their sense of wellbeing. We aim for this to become the go to source of information on the quality of looked after children's care experience and wellbeing.

## **6.0 Our City Our Say Engagement Strategy**

- 6.1 In line with the implementation of the 'Our Manchester' Strategy and the development of a new children and young people's plan it felt timely to review how Manchester City Council and its partners engage children and young people. A new strategy 'Our City, Our Say' has been developed aimed at strengthening and improving the voice and influence of children and young people and the decisions that impact on their lives and the services they receive. This strategy is being updated based on feedback.

- 6.2 Previous sections of this report demonstrate a great deal of activity from a wide range of partners to engage children and young people in their work. This increase in activity reflects the growing commitment to this agenda and as a result young people are reporting that they feel they are having a more active role in their plans and reviews (see 2.5) and greater influence on shaping strategy and policy including the Children and Young People's Plan, Our City Our Children and the Our Manchester Strategy (see 3.1). The Our City Our Say strategy aims to build a more collaborative approach to the delivery of activity and the development of an evidence base to demonstrate impact
- 6.3 The Our City Our Say Strategy has four strands that reflect the areas that children and young people should have the most influence over; Decision - making, individual Choices and Rights, Improving Services and Shaping Communities.
- 6.4 A consultation event was held in September 2016 that was opened by Anne Longfield the Children's Commissioner for England. The event led by young people brought together a wide range of partners and young people to develop the framework and priorities of the strategy.
- 6.5 The Children's Commissioner and members of her team spent two days in Manchester talking with a cross section of young people including Looked After Children, Care Leavers, those involved with the Youth Justice Service and those accessing mental health services. A number of themes emerged from these conversations which were fed back to the Director of Children's Services and the Executive Member for Children. The themes were as follows:
- **Pride** - about the city and what it has to offer
  - **Diversity** – seen as a positive thing about Manchester
  - **Isolation/Boredom** - young people commonly attributed this to getting in trouble and they had ideas around early intervention and youth clubs
  - **Safety**- issues such as crime, drugs and particular geographical areas of concern
  - **Stability**- particularly around children's homes, accommodation, school , social workers and contact with friends
  - **Wellbeing and Mental Health** - long wait times to access some support services
  - **Children and Young Peoples' Participation and Influence** - children and young people evaluating the impact of their voices

These themes have been shared with managers and leaders within Children and Families Services.

- 6.6 The Children's Commissioner observed a real commitment to the involvement of Children and Young People by the City Council and partner agencies.

"We heard and saw at the conference and more widely, where children and young people are leading and driving social activism and in Manchester. In our view, the next steps will be to build upon, and embed engagement as well



as evaluating the impact of their voices in influencing change. We felt real energy around the engagement work happening in Children’s Services in Manchester.”

- 6.7 The Our City Our Strategy will be launched at a themed Children’s Board event in March. The progress of the action plan that will support the delivery the strategy will be monitored by the Children’s Board at an annual themed event jointly organised with young people. The Manchester Youth Council is also planning to host an annual engagement wards ceremony to celebrate the contribution children and young people are making to their city, the first one is planned for this May 2017.

## **7.0 Summary**

- 7.1 There continues to be a steady increase in the numbers of children and young engaged in a wide range of engagement activities led by the City Council and partner agencies. The Our City Our Say strategy will help to take the work forward and to support the collation of evidence to demonstrate the difference the work is having on individuals, families, services and communities.
- 7.2 Elected members are asked to note the content of the report.