

Manchester City Council Report for Information

Report to: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee – 9 March 2022

Subject: Children and Young People Participation and Engagement Plan

Report of: Strategic Director of Children and Education Services

Summary

This report provides an update on the current plans for children and young people's engagement and participation. This report includes both updates from targeted as well as universal services, aligned to the ambitions set out in the Our City, Our Say Strategy. The report also outlines the plans for a refresh of the participation and engagement strategy, in response to global pandemic, new investment from the City Council and national funds and the declaration of the Climate Change Emergency. As Manchester embarks on its journey to become a UNICEF child-friendly city the refreshed strategy will seek an expansion of provision so that more children and young people's voices can be heard, listened to and championed. Manchester will continue to be a city where the voices, needs, priorities and rights of children are an integral part of public policies, programmes and decisions.

Recommendations

The Committee is invited to make comments on the contents of the report and support the proposal to refresh the strategy for children and young people's participation and engagement, noting that the Strategy will be brought back to Scrutiny in late summer 2022 for endorsement and approval.

Wards Affected: All

Environmental Impact Assessment - the impact of the issues addressed in this report on achieving the zero-carbon target for the city

Young people's engagement, participation and democratic involvement is a key component of the work towards achieving the zero-carbon target for the city. That has been evidenced through the development of the Manchester Youth Climate Charter and the creation of video content, developed by young people as part of Skills for Life programme.
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Manchester Strategy outcomes	Summary of how this report aligns to the OMS
A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities	Strong participation and engagement with Young people ensure better connectivity to job opportunities within Manchester. This is achieved through the development of Skills for Life, apprenticeships programmes and work experience.
A highly skilled city: world class and home grown talent sustaining the city's economic success	Participation and engagement with young people ensure a strong affinity to the city and helps employers understand and support the needs, wishes, thoughts, feelings, and views of young people. This in turn contributes to the City's development.
A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities	Through closer alignment of services, young people will be able to share lived experiences enabling them to better support each other whilst ensuring they amplify the voices of those young people who often miss out.
A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work	Removing barriers to participation will include opportunities for young people to be involved in decision making at a local, neighbourhood / area level. This enthuses young people's commitment to the city.
A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth	Young people's participation and engagement in local as well as City wide initiatives and through individual as well as group-based involvement provides them with key life skills.

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Background documents (available for public inspection):

The following documents disclose important facts on which the report is based and have been relied upon in preparing the report. Copies of the background documents are available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy please contact one of the contact officers above.

- Our City, Our Say Strategy 2015-2018
- Children and Young Peoples Plan 2020-2024
- Valuing Young People's Strategy 2016-2019
- Our Manchester Youth Strategy 2019-2023
- Children and Young People's Engagement Annual Report, 2021

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Children and young people's engagement and participation is a key component of the Our Manchester Strategy and the way in which Manchester City Council is seeking to deliver services. Young people's participation is written into the City's constitution and there is a responsibility on the authority to ensure that children and young people have access to holistic participation, engagement, and democracy activities. This is delivered through both universal services and targeted services who work together to ensure the Council fulfils its obligations to children and young people.
- 1.2 Listening to young people's voices and ensuring effective engagement and participation cannot be undertaken in isolation. The Council has a rich history of working alongside the voluntary sector, in particular around youth, play and participation provision and this will be strengthened further, through the establishment of new commissioning arrangements in 2022/23. As such, young people, regardless of their background or geography can be assured that opportunities to have their voices heard whether that be as an individual or part of a group will be heard, listened to and championed.
- 1.3 As indicated in section 1.1, the City Council has two complementary participation services. One supports the development and delivery of universal provision with the other focusing on and supporting targeted groups of children and young people who are in care, care leavers, newly arrived, children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), young carers, and those young people who are being supported by our youth justice and early help services. These services ensure that all children and young people, regardless of their background or barriers, are provided with opportunities to have a voice and be involved in a range of participatory activities as well as supported to amplify their voice through a range of decision-making forums.
- 1.4 The universal offer includes the delivery of the Manchester Youth Council (MYC) as well as associated activities such as the Make Your Mark Ballot - the world's largest young people's ballot and the elections of Members of Youth Parliament. MYC is engaged in a range of activities locally, regionally and nationally and this sits under the umbrella body of the British Youth Council.
- 1.5 The targeted offer includes supporting internal practitioners to have a better understanding of how participation and engagement can be embedded in the plans of all services. Mechanisms have developed over the last 2 years to support practitioners to capture the voices of children and young people and identify ways that these voices can help shape service design and delivery.
- 1.6 Both the universal and the targeted approach to children and young people's participation and engagement will be a central theme of the Our Year work that the Council recently launched. The focus on this throughout 2022 provides a unique opportunity for the Council and our partners to further embed participation, engagement and democracy. Throughout the engagement with children and young people on the development of Our Year,

they told us of their priorities, wishes, concerns and aspirations. These items will start to be addressed over the next 12 months and will form a detailed plan as part of the City's ambition to be a UNICEF's Child Friendly City (CFC).

2.0 Targeted Offer - Participation and Engagement

- 2.1 A detailed Annual Report has been prepared for the year 2020-21, this can be found in Appendix 1. The report focuses specifically on children and young people in Manchester who are in care, care leavers, children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), young carers, and those young people who are being supported by our youth justice and early help services. It provides an overview of the engagement activity and where relevant includes the input of universal services that have supported these cohorts. In turn it looks at what children and young people have been telling us and draws out the key themes.
- 2.2 Engaging with children and young people from vulnerable groups is part of day-to-day practice for participation and engagement teams. However, as a Directorate priority a range of additional engagement methods are used, for example assessment and direct work activities, awards, SEND change makers groups, events, and activities amongst others. The refreshed Children in Care Cooperative provides children and young people with an opportunity to engage with their professional of choice in the way that they feel most comfortable, whether that is in person or through other means of their choice and influence service provision. A plan on a page for the cooperative model can be found in Appendix 2.
- 2.3 Children and young people have told us that the impact of Covid-19 has been without a doubt the biggest single issue facing them. It has consistently been identified as an overarching theme and one that has impacted on all other themes that have been identified. It is also important to note that there is some crossover between some of the themes. The other key themes include:
- Education, Future & Aspirations
 - Mental Health & Emotional Wellbeing
 - Inequalities related to Race & Ethnicity
 - Independence, Access & Safety
- 2.4 The global pandemic has required officers to rethink how they deliver events and activities over the last two years. Many events and activities continued but were just delivered differently. Instead of large events there has been a focus on smaller activities. There has been a mix between virtual and face to face contact to make sure children and young people are safe, happy and healthy; and to ensure support can be provided where needed. Examples include cooking & budgeting sessions for care leavers, co-production of a travel hub for young people with special educational needs and disabilities, volunteering and campaigning, gardening, employability skills & mentoring, sports activities, virtual meetings/conversations (1-1 & groups) and young people's videos / regular welfare calls. Senior officers and elected members also visited schools and holiday clubs to talk to children and young people. It is important to note

that events and activities are not for everyone, so staff have regularly arranged 'catchups' with smaller groups of young people in environments of their choice.

2.5 The Annual Report (see Appendix 1) highlights a significant number of participation and engagement activities in which children and young people have been able to influence services, examples include:

- The SEND Services - influenced and shaped by children and young people. Change Makers co-designed the recent children and young people's SEND Lockdown Experience survey, which had over 360 responses from SEND young people across the city.
- Education Health Care Plans - a child or young person's voice is included in all.
- Youth Violence research and strategy - informed by young people.
- Inclusion Strategy - informed by young people.
- Manchester Achievement & Buzz Awards - clothing events with support from the business sector in improving the experiences and outcomes for looked after children and care leavers.
- The Young Carers strategy co-produced with children and young people, and their voice continues to influence its delivery; voice and asks are clear in the strategy.
- Recruitment and Selection - Children and young people have been involved in the recruitment and selection of new staff.

2.6 The targeted work over the reporting period has had a positive impact and has contributed to the following outputs:

- Co-production charter for strategies and over 97% of children seen as part of assessment and planning practice.
- 94% of young people aged 2-17 years have a Personal Education Plan in place; informed by their aspirations and views.
- 96% of 'Our Children' participate in their Statutory Review.
- Meaningful 'in touch' with 97% of Care Leavers (10% increase).
- 20% reduction in remand since 2018/19.
- 64% of care leavers engaged in Education, Employment and/or Training.
- 63% of Manchester's schools have been awarded Rights Respecting status.

2.7 **Lessons learned** - Frontline practitioners do a great deal of work with young people that has a significant impact on their lives. However, this is not always recorded in a way where it demonstrates the amount of work that has been done and, in some instances, it is not always easy to draw out those examples when practitioners are asked for this information. Children Social Care work with over 5,350 vulnerable children and young people at any one time plus over 5,000 with Education, Health & Care Plans and they have a responsibility to create opportunities for them to engage in a way that feels right for them. This happens all the time, but more can be done to evidence the impact that

this has on young people's lives. The Council and its partners collectively have a responsibility and the engagement framework 'A journey from voice to influence' will help professionals through the process, this can be found in Appendix 3.

2.8 Next steps - In response to the outputs from the Annual Report, practitioners are working to deliver the following priorities:

- Continue to have collective responsibility to allow young people to work with their professional of choice. Engagement and participation with children and young people will be everyone's business.
- Recognise day to day practice as a key part of Participation & Engagement with vulnerable children & young people. Events and activities will be used as additional opportunities for engagement.
- Ensure all teams and partners that we work with have a clear understanding of our new engagement framework (A Journey from Voice to Influence).
- Ensure all our teams have clear mechanisms in place to regularly review what children and young people are telling us and share the learning wider, taking it to a place of influence, especially if further support is required.
- Ensure all service reports include what children and young people are saying, what we have done in response to that and how we have checked that we have got things right.
- Ensure all children & young people are aware of all opportunities and have the choice to engage and collaborate in a way that feels comfortable to them.
- Ensure all teams contribute to large events and consultations.
- Engagement & participation to be wide reaching and not tokenistic.
- Incorporate key local, regional, national and global themes identified into service plans. There are 5 themes that have been identified:
 - a) Covid-19
 - b) Education, Future & Aspirations
 - c) Mental Health & Emotional Wellbeing
 - d) Inequalities related to Race & Ethnicity
 - e) Independence, Access & Safety
- Demonstrate evidence and impact of all participation and engagement activity to inform practice.

3.0 Universal Offer – Refresh of the Participation and Engagement Strategy

3.1 The Our City, Our Say strategy set out an ambition to ensure that Manchester is a good place for children and young people to grow up in and prepare for their futures. The Strategy was underpinned by a desire to see:

- Young people leading their own campaigns and influencing decisions.
- Young people actively involved in volunteering and social-action projects.

- Better services that meet and respond to the needs of children and young people.
- The engagement of children and young people being something everyone does as part of their everyday business/practice.
- A workforce skilled and committed to the engagement of children and young people.
- Children and young people taking an active role in the creation and review of their own individual plans.
- The provision of good-quality opportunities for children and young people, so they can get involved in their communities, develop life skills and be successful

3.2 In response to the ambition set out in 3.1. the offer for children and young people's participation and engagement is seeking to focus on four key areas of delivery, as follows:

- **Decision-making** - Working to involve more children and young people in the formal and informal structures and making decisions.
- **Choices and rights** - Making sure that children and young people know what their rights and entitlements are, and that they can make informed choices.
- **Improving services** - Developing ways of making sure services meet the needs of children and young people by listening and responding to them directly.
- **Building communities** - Making sure that children and young people recognise and have respect for how diverse Manchester is, and how it is a great and very culture-rich city because of this.

3.3 Over the last two years there has been a significant amount of change with regards to the way in which the Council has configured services to deliver on the Our City, Our Say Strategy. This includes aligning the universal offer for children and young people within the Neighbourhood Services Directorate; developing a new Strategy for Youth and Play; restructuring the Youth, Play and Participation Team to reflect the priorities set out in the Strategy; and, taking a decision to change the way in which the Council commissions Youth and Play activity from 2022/23 onwards. In addition, there has been a global pandemic, the declaration of a Climate Change Emergency in Manchester, and additional resources have been pledged by both Manchester City Council and from national sources to improve outcomes for children and young people. In this context, the Our city, Our Say Strategy for young people's participation and engagement will now be refreshed over the next 6 months to ensure that it is aligned to the recent changes.

3.4 **Decision Making** - In 2020 12,002 young people were supported to take part in the online ballot during lockdown. In the previous year 2019, 25,725 young people aged 11-18 took part in the ballot, which was a 53.87% turnout. This year's ballot has recently gone live and part of the Our Year theme 'Connected' officers have been supporting schools and other settings to encourage as many young people as possible to take part in this year's UK

wide decision-making process. Young people across the UK and Manchester are currently voting on which of the following topics are of the highest priority:

- Covid Recovery
- Education and Learning
- Environment
- Health and Well- Being
- Jobs
- Money
- Homes & Opportunities
- Our rights and democracy
- Poverty.

The refreshed strategy will seek to ensure more children and young people are involved in the formal and informal decision-making structures. Whilst significant progress has been made on this in recent years, particularly with the development of School Council's, the Manchester Youth Council and Members of the Youth Parliament, in decision making, more can still be done to help reach out to children and young people through wider membership structures and campaigns and to increase the use of digital solutions to support decision-making.

3.5 **Choices & Rights** - There are many examples of where children and young people have been more active in the development of plans, these include inputting to the refresh of the Our Manchester strategy, attending Children's board and feeding into the priorities of the Youth Strategy. However, in line with the Manchester's Children and young people plan, we will continue to recognise and value the voices of children and young people in all areas of our work, listening to them and responding to what they tell us. Children and young people will have the opportunity to be active participants in shaping both policy and practice, as well as the future city. A sharper focus needs to be placed on making sure children and young people can make positive choices by being able to access good-quality information and ensuring that there is access to good advocacy support if needed.

3.6 **Improving Services** - There are some excellent examples of how services have sought to meet the needs of children and young people by listening and responding to them directly, as well as ensuring children and young people having a say in the recruitment of staff. For example, young people are currently involved in the integration and cohesion consultation. However, more focus needs to be placed on developing ways to check that services are consistently meeting the needs of children and young people. This should include working more effectively to achieve full co-production with children, young people and services; and, encouraging the sharing of good practice and feedback from children and young people between services. Officers will continue to focus on children's strengths and provide them with the support to build resilience and overcome obstacles. As part of this teams are working to celebrate the successes of children and young people and to encourage them to reach their full potential.

3.7 **Building Communities** - The Skills for Life Initiative has provided significant opportunities for children and young people to build communities through volunteering and working with the community to gain the skills they need to be active citizens. 500 young people were supported and encouraged to record the skills they acquired through the NCS programme over the summer of 2021. Several of our schools and settings are using the Skills for Life programme to help build young people's confidence and self-belief, post pandemic. However, more support is needed to provide networking and peer-support opportunities and activities; and, making sure that there are opportunities for children and young people to help inform local plans. The development of area youth forums, the detail of which was set out to Children and Young Peoples Scrutiny last autumn, will present an opportunity to address this. Representatives from these forums will also be active members of the Area Youth Panels, which will determine the allocation of commissioning funding and the forum will bring together young people from universal and targeted provision.

3.8 **Climate Change Emergency** – In 2019 25,484 young people across Manchester took part in the Annual Make Your Mark ballot. 12,421 voted to protect the environment. Following this Manchester Youth Council ran workshops with 250 young people to create a Climate Wheel which could support young people to act and encourage others too. The climate wheel empowers young people to take action and supports the city's zero carbon strategy. There has also been some excellent work through the climate change emergency summits that were organised for children and young people prior to the global pandemic. This work along with the work undertaken on the Youth Climate Charter can be intensified as part of a refreshed strategy. There is a strong commitment and appetite for children and young people to play a more active role in developing policies to reduce emissions and the new participation and engagement strategy will set out how this will be addressed. In 2021 Manchester Youth Council won the Youth Focus Northwest most committed to saving the planet award. Below captures a snapshot of the comments from Manchester's children who have been engaged in the above work

"We use the climate wheel and we have meet free Mondays and I eat more veg now" Ali aged 10.

"We take turns to prepare the food, and healthy snacks" Lily aged 7.

"By planning the week menus, we don't waste food, we only plan what we need" Luke aged 9.

3.9 **Recovering from the Pandemic** - The focus on Our Year will provide an excellent platform to build the participation and engagement of children and young people as the city seeks to recover from the global pandemic. Internally this will provide the impetus to ensure closer alignment of both targeted and universal services, whilst externally the focus will enable business and the voluntary sector to align more closely with the ambition. This will ensure that more young people across the city have access to more opportunities, can

support each other and amplify the voices of each other and their peers through various decision-making platforms.

4.0 Next Steps 2022/23

- 4.1 Following significant change over the last 12 months, the recruitment to vacant posts within the Youth, Play and Participation Team is now well advanced. With the commitment to Our Year coupled with new investment and additional staffing resources, there is a significant opportunity to raise the bar and be far more ambitious over the next 12 months. As such, the following new programmes of work will be undertaken ensuring an even stronger offer for children and young people.
- 4.2.1 **Strategy Refresh** - A refreshed strategy for participation and engagement will be developed in parallel with the work that is already underway on refreshing the Needs Analysis for Children and Young People and the revised Youth and Play Commissioning approach for 2023 onwards. This document and framework will provide overarching objectives as well as specific measurable outcomes which will meet the needs of children and young people, practitioners, the City Council and voluntary sector providers / partners. The document and framework will also provide a roadmap for further, closer alignment between the services. It is proposed that a report will be brought back to Scrutiny in late summer 2022 setting out all three of these workstreams.
- 4.2.2 **Targeted and Universal Service Integration** – Further work will be undertaken to strengthen the connectivity between the two teams both in terms of approach and unifying the strategy. This will enable young people across the city have access to more opportunities, can support each other and amplify the voices of each other and their peers through various decision-making platforms. This will also lead to greater equity of opportunity for all young people including the Shadow Executive programme which will be launched in May 2022.
- 4.2.3 **Intensify Partnership work** - Working in partnership with schools, closer ties between school councils / forums and the work of the Council's participation services will be formed. Schools have, historically, engaged well with one off events, such as the Youth Elections and Make Your Mark however officers will look at developing systems and structures so that a holistic participation programme of activity can be developed and delivered. Initially, we will work with secondary schools and pupil referral units because of the historical ties / context (i.e., Youth Elections / Make Your Mark). In doing so, more young people will be engaging in decision making processes and young people who are in receipt of targeted provision will have access to additional support structures.
- 4.2.4 **Area Youth Forums** - Developing area youth forums which will link into the Manchester Youth Council. Representatives from these forums will be active members of the Area Youth Panels which will determine allocation of commissioning money. The area youth forums which will bring together young

people from universal and targeted provision and will focus primarily on project and campaign development and delivery. The Skills for Life agenda will be the central tenant through all youth forums. Additionally, forums will work closely with Neighbourhood Teams as well as other locality providers / partners.

4.2.5 **Our Year Impetuous** - Specifically relating to Our Year, additional support will be offered to the wider Authority through to ensure that officers continue, and in some cases begin, to place children and young people's voices at the centre of decision making especially when it affects them. In addition, and following the success of engagement activities last year, senior leaders will continue to engage regularly with children young people to ensure that they are actively listening to and championing the voices of children and young people. Officers will also continue to work with voluntary sector partners supporting them to be actively involved in leading the initiative in local communities.

4.2.6 **More Opportunities** - Providing more opportunities for young people to be involved in "one-off" participation, engagement, and democracy opportunities. Whilst MYM and the elections of Members of Youth Parliament are examples of this, the two services will work on identifying other avenues as well as bespoke opportunities (such as Youth Bank, Youth Summits, Eurocities) in which individual young people can engage in a way that meets their social, emotional, and physical development. We will also identify mechanisms as to how these opportunities can link into formal structures such as the Manchester Youth Council, Area Youth Forums and Area Youth Panels.

5.0 Conclusion

5.1 The last two years have challenged everybody, but nobody more so than the children and young people in cities such as Manchester. Despite this, officers have found innovative ways to continue to ensure services are provided and that children and young peoples voices can be heard. Our Year presents an excellent opportunity to accelerate the life chances of all children and young people and to ensure that services are creating the mechanisms for full participation and engagement. The refreshed strategy will focus on achieving this and ensure stronger coordination across the Council, as well as the voluntary and business sectors. A whole system approach to participation and engagement coupled with a renewed alignment between young people's experiences and the services they receive, will ensure greater connectivity to corporate priorities. All of this will provide a strong evidence base to assist in Manchester becoming a Child Friendly City.