
To: Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)

Date: 24 November 2021

Subject: Voice of the Child

1 Purpose of the Note

- 1.1 To inform the Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) of the methods used to identify the voice of the child, through the use of technology when engaging with specific groups of children and young people.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) are recommended to:
1. Note the current methods used to capture the voice of children and young people.
 2. Identify any further recommendations for the appropriate Cabinet Member.

3 Background and Information

- 3.1 Coventry Children's Services employs various methods to support children and young people in sharing their wishes, feelings and aspirations. This includes during direct work, group activities, surveys, focus groups and technology, details of which can be found in appendix 1. The focus of this briefing note is on the use of technology.

4 Methods

4.1 Mind of My Own

Mind of My Own is an app designed and co-produced with Children and young people, to support them in sharing their views, concerns and thoughts about their lives. It has been successfully used in Coventry since 2019. To date **458** young people, have their own account, (although many more children and young people access the app via their worker), **699** staff have been trained and have a worker account, **2459** individual statements have been received from children and young people. Part of the app has been specifically designed to support children and young people living with special educational needs and disabilities to share their voice and have a say in decision making. The app has various themes children and young people can access, the most popular in Coventry are:

Theme	Total sent
My Wellbeing	391
My Life	287
My Worker is visiting	209
I want to share good news	127
I have a problem	107

The lesser used areas of the app by children, young people and workers are based around meetings:

Theme	Total sent
Preparing for a conference	43
Preparing for a foster care review	33
Feedback following a meeting	19

(This is an area for awareness raising amongst staff and further development.)

Some of the benefits of using Mind of My Own have been:

- a) Children and young people on the autistic spectrum have shared more via the app than previously with their worker.
- b) During Covid-19 lockdowns, it was an effective tool for young people to keep in touch with their worker.
- c) Young people have used the app to tell their worker something that is difficult to say in person.
- d) Staff have benefitted from being able to upload to case files young people's views in their own words.
- e) Children, young people and staff have all benefitted from sharing good news rather than focusing on issues all the time.

4.2 Leaving Well

Coventry has been partnering with Social Finance for the past three years as a pilot authority in the development of Leaving Well. Leaving Well is a pioneering, new digital approach to leaving care services, centred around the Leaving Well Digital Tool. The new style pathway plan has been successful in ensuring all pathway plans are completed and reviewed via Leaving Well. This has several advantages:

- a) Plans are living documents which are always being reviewed and therefore in date.
- b) Both workers and young people have feedback, resulting in pathway planning being more meaningful and impactful.
- c) The information provided about our care leavers comes directly from them.
- d) The dashboard of information allows us for the first time to really understand what is going on for care leavers and provides more richness than the limited information captured via statutory returns to central government.
- e) Interventions are targeted, e.g., being able to identify all young people who needed more support around education, training and employment.

Currently all pathway planning is completed through the app, enabling young people to share their feedback 'in real time'. This means the service is responsive to their needs and able to identify trends and/or areas of focus.

4.3 Supporting CYP living with special educational needs and disabilities to have a voice.

Various methods are employed to ensure CYP have a voice including;

- a) A project involving 34 children and young people aged between 8-14 years, set up to understand children and young people's experiences of the pandemic. Widgets and Makaton, (the use of symbols, signs, and speech to replace written words), were used to support children and young people with communication issues.
- b) CYP with visual impairment make use of Screen sharing Apps for sharing white board screen in classroom with young person on laptop or tablet—e.g. Team Viewer and Join Me app <https://www.teamviewer.com/en/>. Screen reading technology including touch typing programmes. Students use phones and tablets to take images and zoom in. There are also specific apps, such as, 'Seeing AI' which is a talking camera for the blind

to identify images or read writing <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/seeing-ai/id999062298>. Hardware used includes, electronic Brailers, and CCTV's electronic Brailers <https://www.enhancedvision.com/low-vision/cctv-magnifiers.html>.

- c) The use of MS Teams has also had a positive impact on the number of young people attending annual reviews and expressing their opinions. It is thought that online is a less intimidating environment than being in a room with a range of professionals.

4.4 Kooth

Kooth is a safe, free and confidential way for young people to access emotional wellbeing and early intervention mental health support, it is actively promoted by Coventry Children's Services. The service is available to all young people across Coventry aged 11-25 years from April 2021 and is jointly funded by the City Council and Coventry and Rugby Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG).

Kooth.com is an award winning and innovative online mental health and wellbeing support service, accredited by the [British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy \(BACP\)](#), which supports and complements the existing offer operated by Rise - a family of NHS-led services providing emotional wellbeing & mental health services for young people across the county. Rise already provide a well-established 24/7 telephone service providing crisis support to young people across Coventry. Kooth deliver digital self-help resources and online counselling to further extend the local offer.

Fully trained and qualified counsellors and emotional wellbeing practitioners are available from midday to 10pm, and from 6pm to 10pm at weekends, 365 days a year to provide a much needed out-of-hours service for emotional support in an accessible way. Sessions can be booked in advance or they can drop in for one-to-one instant text-based chats.

The service also encourages peer to peer support via moderated discussion forums, and self-help through reading or submitting content. Children and young people have 24/7 access to magazines with wellbeing articles, personal experiences and tips from young people and the Kooth team, as well as giving members the opportunity to write in a daily journal to track feelings or emotions and promote a positive mental health and wellbeing.

5 Other methods of participation used within Coventry Children's services

5.1 Participation Team

The key aim of the Participation Team is to support the delivery of the first element of Coventry Children's Services Vision, namely:

"Children are at the heart of everything we do; they are involved as key partners in planning and decision making". (2016).

The Participation Team currently works with children, young people, Coventry City Council colleagues and its partners both locally and nationally to ensure:

- Children and young people have a voice about the decisions that impact upon them.
- Children and young people take part in the commissioning, design, development and monitoring of the services they access; and as such provide the Council with a critical friend, whilst influencing commissioning, service design and improvement.
- Children and young people are celebrated for the added value they bring to the city of Coventry.
- Colleagues and partners are advised, supported and challenged around participation good practice; and the views of CYP are used to develop increasing levels of participation.

The Participation Team is a focal point for engagement across children's services. With the support of children and young people and colleagues, the team has added value by:

- a) Developing, raising awareness and monitoring of the Participation Strategy. The strategy currently incorporates activity across looked after children and care leavers, children in need, child protection and children living with special educational needs and disabilities. The development of the strategy helped to identify gaps around engagement and enabled work, that had previously not been identified as good practice, to be shared with colleagues. Similarly, areas for development are also being highlighted.
- b) Children and young people feedback, regarding the services they access, is influencing practice development.
- c) Production of 3 videos, created with the support of children and young people has been an effective way of reaching large numbers of staff and highlighted the importance of the lived experiences and voice of the child.
- d) Throughout the pandemic, the Participation Team have supported colleagues to continue to involve children and young people in recruitment and selection panels. This has included some innovative methods of involvement when it was not possible for them to physically attend panels. Examples include candidates taking part in role play with young people over Zoom and young people marking leaflets/posters pre-prepared by candidates in advance of their interview with professionals.
- e) Producing effective, interactive, age appropriate children's guides, known locally as 'Welcome Packs.' These have been well received by children, young people, carers and staff alike.
- f) Developing the programme, training staff and managing the Mind of My Own app locally has been so successful that we have won a couple of national awards. These were for best usage of the app and best resources created by an area.
- g) Supported teams from across children's services to review their child friendly literature and direct work tools.
- h) The Young Inspectors project has been developed and is currently being delivered in all the Family Hubs in Coventry. This is proving to be an excellent way to hear the views of our children receiving help from Early Help and Protection colleagues.

5.2 Participation Database

The database allows us to monitor participation across looked after children aged 5-18 years and identify where there are gaps. Currently there are **744** on children's services dashboard, of which **551** are between 5-18 years. All but 33 of these have had some sort of contact via the Participation Team over the last year. Of those 33, **19** have been in care since 1st July 2021 and will shortly receive a Welcome Pack. The other 14 require follow-up. The table below breaks down the figures:

Activity	Contacted	Comment
Welcome Packs issued	501	Sent out by the Participation Team with an accompanying letter explaining its purpose and to show their worker. All relevant teams have been visited to explain content.
Virtual LAC Awards	419	The LAC awards are aimed at 16 years and under.
Recruitment Panels	23	This includes a mixture of face to face and virtual activity.
Consultations	432	Various consultations on the Pledge survey, Tier 2 mental health and CAMHs.
General mailouts	419	including information about how to access Mind of My Own

Wellbeing checks	90	Our most vulnerable young people living in secure units or residential homes, have been contacted to check on their wellbeing and identify any needs.
Social Activity	96	This includes activities held on-line during lockdown periods and some face to face activity.
Young People led groups	27	Little Voices, Voices of Care and Care leavers.

5.3 Young Inspectors

Young Inspectors is a youth led programme which provides children and young people a platform for their views and opinions of the services they access. Recommendations made, will support services in the development of their offer and help to ensure services are meeting the needs of the children and young people they work with.

How it works

- Children and young people, (from 8 years upwards), voluntarily take part in the programme.
- The children and young people involved, will either be accessing the service directly, be based within the area that the service functions or be from the services target group.
- Young Inspectors receive training, then work together to design the inspection criteria and materials, so each inspection is be-spoke to that service. Once the prep work is complete, they carry out the inspection and provide recommendations on their findings. The Young Inspectors are supported by the Participation Team throughout.
- The Young Inspectors programme is offered to all services, within Coventry City Council, that work directly with young people, the Family Hubs are the first to be inspected.
- Family Hub inspections will vary between:
 - Assessment based, (focused on grading or scoring against fixed criteria or set of standards) or
 - Development based (Focused on identifying areas for improvement and suggesting recommendations for moving forward.)
- Family Hub inspections started in August 2021, following the training of the relevant Young Inspectors.
- Findings will be presented in a child friendly report. This will be shared with both the inspected service and Children's Senior Leadership Team in the autumn term. Agreed recommendations to be taken forward in action plan and monitored over an agreed period.
- Following inspections and feedback from both the inspected service and Children's Senior Leadership Team there will be a celebration event for all involved. This will help highlight the value placed on children and young people views.

Aims of the programme:

- To provide all children and young people involved the chance to speak up and share their views about the services they access and/or are available to them.
- To increase children and young people's awareness of the services available to them.
- To raise awareness amongst staff of the value of children and young people's voices.
- To promote the importance of children's rights.
- To increase children and young people and service provider engagement.
- To improve outcomes for children and young people and the development of skills, e.g. analytical, active listening, teamwork, communication, observation and presentation skills.

From inspections services may be able to...

- Identify changes and improvements that need to be implemented as a result of the inspection.

- Have a better understanding of service user experiences from the children and young people they work with and communities they serve.
- Deliver effective outcomes for young people. Have the potential to increase the number of young people accessing the service and promote the voice of the child by listening to children and young people's views and wishes.
- Surveys have been sent out to all Family Hubs. By completing these surveys, staff are self-evaluating their strengths and areas for development. The surveys will be reviewed by the Young Inspectors to see if they agree.

5.4 Young people led groups

'Little Voices' and 'Voices of Care' make up our local Children in Care Council. A separate Care leavers group contributes to the Corporate Parenting Board and Coventry Youth Council provide a more generic voice.

Over the last year many of the sessions have had to be held virtual via MS Teams. This has proven challenging as young people have not been keen to spend all day completing schoolwork on-line and then being expected to join additional activities on-line in the evening. Colleagues from across the West Midlands have reported a similar finding. However, children and young people have still contributed to some consultations, informed the development of child friendly literature for Family Group Conferencing, Independent Reviewing Officers and the Youth Offending Service. They have also been involved in the commissioning of Tier 2 mental health, supported accommodation and CAMHs. Plus had extensive involvement in the recruitment of staff for the new Coventry Family Valued project, produced 3 videos to aid staff development and spoken to Ofsted during their focused visit in May 2021.

Below is a digital photograph of piece of work recently carried out which shares some care leavers view of their care journey. The original is 3 metres long and we hope to be able to display it for staff to access.



5.5 Moderation of case note files, focusing on the voice of the child

Over the last 12 months 61 files have been moderated with a focus on the voice of the child, following a general audit which looked at all domains including the voice of the child.

Findings	Auditor View	Voice of the child moderation
Meets good	20	6
Does not meet good	40	47
Cannot comment	0	8
Exceeds good	1	0
Total	61	61

The moderator looking at files from the perspective of the voice of the child is looking for evidence to demonstrate:

- The voice of the child/young person has been heard, recorded and appropriately acted upon.
- Children and young people's lived experiences are recorded.
- There is an understanding of CYP's wishes and feelings.
- Children and young people have been seen regularly and spoken to alone.
- Advocacy has been offered.
- Direct work is recorded and purposeful.
- There are observations where a child is too young to communicate their wishes and feelings and/or children and young people have communication difficulties/issues.
- Actions are SMART and delivered in a child friendly format.
- Positive experiences/outcomes are recorded as well as the issues.

What worked well

- There is evidence of good practice where children and young people's views are listened to and appropriately acted upon.
- Where the child is too young to communicate their wishes and feelings, some practitioners have included useful observations of the child interacting with their care givers, others and environment, which they have then reflected upon and included in their forward planning.
- Actions are clear, SMART and written in a child friendly format.
- The Signs of Safety format is being used more regularly across services. Alongside this there is evidence of child friendly safety plan on file along with evidence which suggests the child/young person understands and agrees to follow it.
- There are records of children and young people being seen alone and being offered access to advocacy.

What we are worried about

- Auditor and participation moderator, on occasion, disagree about findings. However, it is important to recognise that the auditor was grading on the case file overall and the moderator (participation view), focused solely on the voice of the child.
- There are occasions in files, where there is no clear pen picture of the child leaving the reader with a lack of understanding of the child's needs, wishes, feelings or aspirations. This finding was often compounded by sparse notes which do not explain why social care is involved.
- Examples of the specific child not being visible where the information provided combines data on all siblings and/or the focus being on another child/children. Alternatively, the child is invisible because the focus of the notes is on parents.
- Instances of the voice of the child being cut and pasted across several visits/reviews
- A lack of recorded observations of children where they are too young to voice their views.
- Case notes that refer to direct work, but not evidenced in documents.
- Signs of Safety strengths and worries documents only listing the strengths of the parents/carers.
- Where a child has shared a specific worry/issue, this is not always followed up by direct work or referenced in the plan.
- Child's lived experiences not identified, or the impact of our involvement explored.
- Child not seen and/or not seen alone for substantial periods of time.

5.6 Service user feedback forms

a. Parent/Carer quarterly Feedback:

Q1: Do you understand why Children's Services is or, was involved with you and your family?

Q2: How involved were you in decisions which affect your child?

Q3: Have/did Children's Services listen to what you have/had to say?

Q4: Have/did Children's Services do what they say/said they are/were going to do?

Q5: How much has / did working with Children's Services help you as a family?

Year	Quarter	Feedback not provided	Feedback Provided	Total
2020/21	1	n/a	99 (100%)	99
	2	56 (37%)	97 (63%)	153
	3	91 (42%)	127 (58%)	218
	4	111 (47%)	125 (53%)	236

There has been a sustained improvement in the volume of parent/carers feedback returns attempted and collected.

Commentary on city wide findings for the last Quarter:

Parent/carers satisfaction was generally positive, although a little lower than previous quarter, across the board. The table below, provides the average mark out of 10 that parent/carers gave their workers. Question 5, remains the lowest scoring question across all quarters, highlighting concerns around families' perception of the impact of interventions. Question 2 & 3 showed drops of over half a point compared to the previous quarter, highlighting a decrease in how involved and listened to parents felt they were through support.

	Average of Question 1	Average of Question 2	Average of Question 3	Average of Question 4	Average of Question 5
Qtr. 2	9.32	8.85	8.85	8.29	8.12
Qtr. 3	9.36	8.71	9.00	8.66	7.92
Qtr. 4	9.37	9.05	9.05	8.43	7.95
Qtr. 1	9.10	8.49	8.46	8.30	7.80
12-month Average	9.28	8.76	8.83	8.43	7.94

Generally high levels of satisfaction were reported over the past year, although the last quarter showed the lowest satisfaction levels over the 12 months. Question 5 (*How much has / did working with Children's Services help you as a family?*) remains the lowest scoring question throughout the year, highlighting concerns around families' perception of the impact of interventions, although there is a caveat here as some parents who have had children removed or made subject to CP plans are unlikely to feel they were 'helped'.

b. Children and young people's feedback

Children and young people's feedback has only been reported on via the quarterly report for quarters 3 and 4. Figures remain low whilst more work is done to embed this activity.

		DO YOU KNOW WHY THE WORKER IS VISITING YOU?		HAVE THE VISITS MADE A POSITIVE CHANGE?		HAS THERE BEEN ANY CHANGE SINCE YOUR WORKER STARTED VISITING YOU?		
TEAM	Number Completed	NO	YES	NO	YES	Things have got better	Things have got worse	Things have stayed the same
Early Help Central	97	18 (19%)	79 (81%)	11 (11%)	86 (89%)	68 (70%)	7 (7%)	22 (23%)
Early Help East	1	0	1 (100%)	0	1 (100%)	0	0	1 (100%)
Early Help South	21	2 (10%)	19 (90%)	2 (10%)	19 (90%)	16 (76%)	0	5 (24%)
Early Help West	6	0	6 (100%)	0	6 (100%)	5 (83%)	0	1 (17%)
Protection East	1	0	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	0	0	1 (100%)	0
Grand Total	126	20	106	14	112	89	8	29

Combined feedback from quarters 3 and 4

What worked well

- Children and young people's feedback is now monitored quarterly.
- The number of returns from Early Help Central and South is positive. Generally young people know why the worker is visiting, visits have made a positive change and 70% of respondents feel things have got better.

What we are worried about

- Not enough feedback forms are being collected from our children and young people
- Several teams did not record any responses and others very few, from children and young people. Low response rates make it difficult to determine satisfaction levels.
- The response from Area teams in the East, reports that the young person knows why the worker is visiting but feels there has not been a positive change and their situation has got worse. The Team Manager has been requested follow-up with this young person to understand their lived experience and reasons for this response.

5.7 New Belongings

Coventry is part of wave 2, of Coram Voice, New Belongings project. Care leavers were surveyed to identify where they were flourishing and where things could be improved. This helped to produce an evidence base of care leavers experience and well-being to inform service improvements.

247 Coventry care leavers completed the survey, producing a response rate of 65%. Following receipt of the findings, Children's Services staff, young people and Coram Voice, collaborated to produce an action plan. Key areas for development included housing and accommodation, emotional well-being and finance.

As a result of the survey and its findings, Coventry Children's Services have initiated the Housing Project, where care leavers are supported to develop the practical and emotional skills they need to live independently. Work is also being done with a new budgeting tool application to support care leavers. In September 2021, a review of New Belongings is planned with the aim of repeating the survey in January 2022.

5.7 Life Story work

In 2018, the Social Work Academy, supported by young people from Voices of Care, developed a good practice guide for life story work. This has been widely disseminated and used by staff.

During Covid-19 restrictions, the delivery of direct work changed. Families in transition or deemed high risk/vulnerable continued to be seen face to face. All other visits took place virtually, following completion of individual risk assessments to agree this. During virtual visits, where possible, staff incorporated interactive games, stories and pictures to ensure life story work continued. However, some of this work was put on hold, with the aim of resuming in person meetings as soon as possible. It has been acknowledged that maintaining attention with children virtually has had its challenges.

Currently, a project group has been formed to:

- a) Further develop the role of Life Story Champions
- b) Compile toolkits for staff to access-ensuring there are materials included which also support older children

The aim is to ensure that life story work is not viewed as a tick box exercise and is purposeful and undertaken throughout the child/young person's care journey.

5.8 Lifelong Links and Family Group Conferencing

Children and young people inform practice via direct liaison with coordinators and formal service user feedback. During Covid-19 restrictions, the service offered three options which were influenced and guided by young people:

- a) to hold meetings via MS Teams
- b) to pause progression until restrictions were lifted
- c) to progress, where possible via telephone and written communication

Some young people were keen to progress via virtual platforms. Others felt apprehensive, especially where a working relationship with the coordinator had not yet been established. All three options were made use of and children and young people shared they valued having the choice. Some conferences have been written up as case studies, which maintain anonymity, but reflect children and young people's experience of conferences. These are excellent learning and awareness raising tools for staff. Currently coordinators are looking to develop their child friendly information about the service and want to ensure children and young people are actively involved in that process. They are also considering the development of service user panels. One possible format is to have a panel, quarterly, made up of young people and family members, who have had a conference during that quarter, to discuss:

- a) What worked well?
- b) Areas for development/improvement?
- c) Anything missing that would have helped?
- d) Could service have been offered earlier?

5.9 Family Hubs

There are 8 Family Hubs across Coventry, they are multi-agency centres, based within neighbourhoods which offer help and support. The key aim of hubs is to provide early

interventions to prevent children, young people and families moving towards higher levels of need.

Each hub focuses on a specific geographical area, identifying need and providing a multi-agency response. Families are kept in touch via community notice boards, newsletters, local schools and Facebook. Partnership coordinators ensure information from all the hubs is shared, promoted appropriately and there is learning from good practice. In excess of 15,000 residents are regularly reached.

With regards to children and young people, the hubs are at the forefront of using the Mind of My Own app, they have provided youth sessions during holiday periods and deliver child friendly interventions. Young people's feedback informs how sessions can be further developed. To ensure hubs are offering what their local community needs, they measure customer experience, twice a year, via the Let's Talk Coventry platform. In addition, feedback forms are offered to all families following periods of intervention.

Currently all the hubs are taking part in the Young Inspector's programme. This activity will inform hubs about how they are viewed from a young person's perspective.

6. Conclusion

All this activity is monitored quarterly as part of the Participation Strategy. Monitoring enables Coventry Children's Services to articulate the status of participation activity across our services, celebrate successes and identify areas for development. Participation is recognised as 'everyone's' business with services developing mechanisms for children, young people, parents and carers to have a voice about the services they access and inform practice.

Moving forward, the expectation is that participation work will be further enhanced through the Voice and Influence strand of the Coventry Family Valued project.

Name of Author: Sheila Bates

Job Title: Children's Champion

Organisation: Participation Team, Quality Assurance, Children's Services

Contact details: Sheila.bates@coventry.gov.uk 024 7697 1848