



Children and Young People's Participation Strategy 2025-2027

TORFAEN
COUNTY
BOROUGH



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Foreword



Cllr Richard Clark
Torfaen Council Executive
Member for Children, Families
and Education

Firstly, I would like to thank you for reading our first Children and Young People's Participation Strategy.

I talk to many young people in my role as the council's Executive Member for Children, Families and Education and I know it can be hard for young people to relate to the work we do.

We use lots of technical terms like policies, strategies, scrutiny and objectives, and often work on projects that take a long time to deliver.

But we make decisions on a daily basis that affect your day-to-day lives and your future. Such as decisions about which schools receive funding, what new sports facilities we will invest in, how we support families who are struggling, how we protect our natural environment and increase local job opportunities.

We have an annual five-year programme called Future Torfaen A County Plan that sets out what we want to achieve, and how we plan to achieve it, by 2027.

We have done this by identifying nine well-being objectives that show how we want to improve the borough. The first two – and I would argue the most important – are about how we will help and support children and young people to succeed and thrive.

But we cannot do it without your help.

We need you to tell us what you think we're doing right, and what we could be doing better.

I understand it's not always easy to get your voice heard, so this strategy explains how we will support you to express your views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting you.

We hope this strategy will help us achieve our ultimate vision – that children, young people and your families are safe, healthy and achieve your full potential.



The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child



In Wales, we have committed to supporting children and young people to exercise their rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989). The convention outlines 42 Articles which set out the rights children and young people have. There is a duty on Welsh Ministers to consider children's rights in everything they do.

Article 12 focuses on the right to participate. It states: 'Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously'.

Our commitment to participation

Article 12 recognises children and young people's entitlement to influence actions and decisions that affect them. We commit to meaningfully involving and supporting you to have a say in decisions that may affect you.

If participation is to be effective, meaningful and long lasting, it needs to be an ongoing process that we will develop together, rather than a one-off activity. It requires an ongoing commitment in terms of your contributions, our staff and funding.

Participation: How? What? Why? A guide for professionals Children's Commissioner for Wales 2021.

A summary of the un convention on the rights of the child, unicef United Kingdom 2019.



Our Core Values

Torfaen Council has four core values that are important to how we work - they will influence how we will help you to participate with us.

Supportive

We will:

Be helpful and communicate clearly.

Involve you as early as possible. We will be clear about what can and can't change and the timescale for change. We will explain different options to you and give you time to think through your ideas.

Share as much information as we can with you and make the ways we work accessible, creative, age appropriate and fun!

Support our staff to understand what participation is and develop the necessary skills and knowledge so that they feel confident in involving you in decision-making.

Fair

We will:

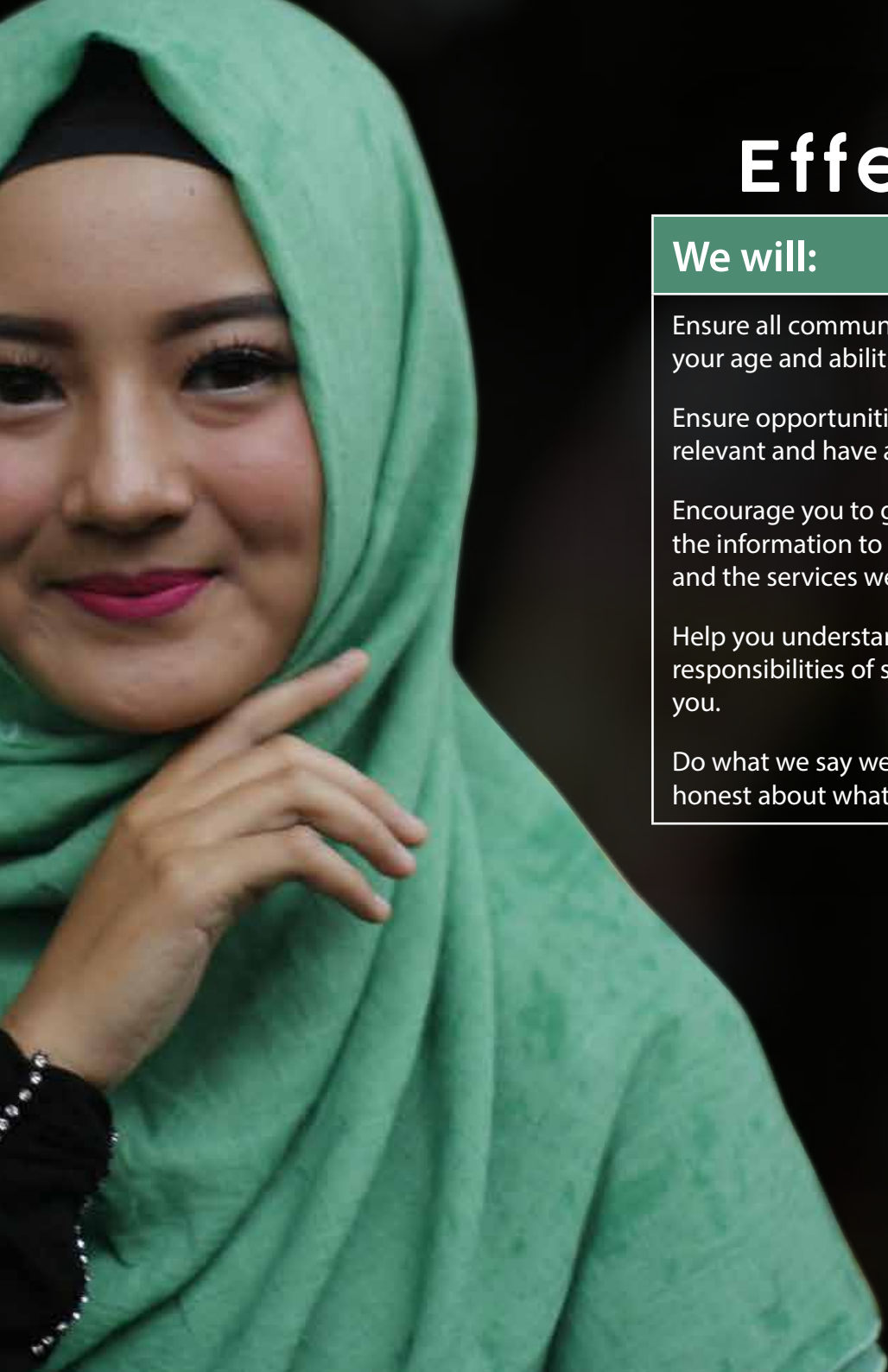
Help you feel safe to express your views clearly and honestly. We will be respectful and not judge you if your view is different from ours. We will respect your privacy and not share your information without your permission unless we legally must do so.

Be accountable for the decisions we involve you in and always seek to let you know the outcome. We will let you know how your participation has influenced the outcome.

Make sure our decisions are clear, and explain the evidence we used to come to these decisions. We will ensure that we do the right things and for the right reasons. We will be open, honest, and reliable.

Help you take part and express yourself in decisions that affect you. We will make sure you are listened to, understood and your views are taken into account.

Encourage you to speak up if you feel that you are not being listened to, understood, or disagree with a decision that has been made. We will encourage you to speak to the professional you know best. If this is not possible, you can speak to their manager or we will support you to contact our complaints team.



Effective

We will:

- Ensure all communications are suitable for your age and abilities.
- Ensure opportunities to participate are relevant and have a clear purpose.
- Encourage you to give us feedback and use the information to improve the way we work and the services we provide.
- Help you understand the roles and responsibilities of staff that work alongside you.
- Do what we say we are going to do and be honest about what can be achieved.

Innovative

We will:

- Create space for you to tell us your ideas about how we could work differently or how you could change things that matter to you.
- Recognise the contribution you make to how we work and celebrate your achievements.
- Learn about and reduce barriers to help you participate.
- Continue to learn and challenge ourselves to develop approaches and opportunities for you to participate.

What is participation?

Participation is about being listened to and understood.

In summary, participation includes:

- **Having the opportunity to be involved in decision-making.**
- **Having a say in services that affect you.**
- **Being able to influence how things are made better.**
- **Being listened to and knowing what you say will be taken seriously.**
- **Knowing the difference your views and ideas have made.**



Participating in individual, operational and strategic decision-making

It's important to understand you can contribute to decisions in different ways. For example:

Individual decisions that affect you:

e.g. Choosing your GCSE options.



- It is a decision that directly affects your life.
- It has an impact on your day-to-day activities.
- The result mainly affects you.

Operational decisions that affect people in the short-term:

e.g. Filling out a survey letting us know how our services work or don't work for you.



- What you tell us will help our planning, delivery and evaluation of services.
- The information will help improve the quality of our services.
- The results affect you and other service users.

Strategic decisions that affect people in the longer term:

e.g. You are a member of the council's youth forum to help improve facilities and services for young people.

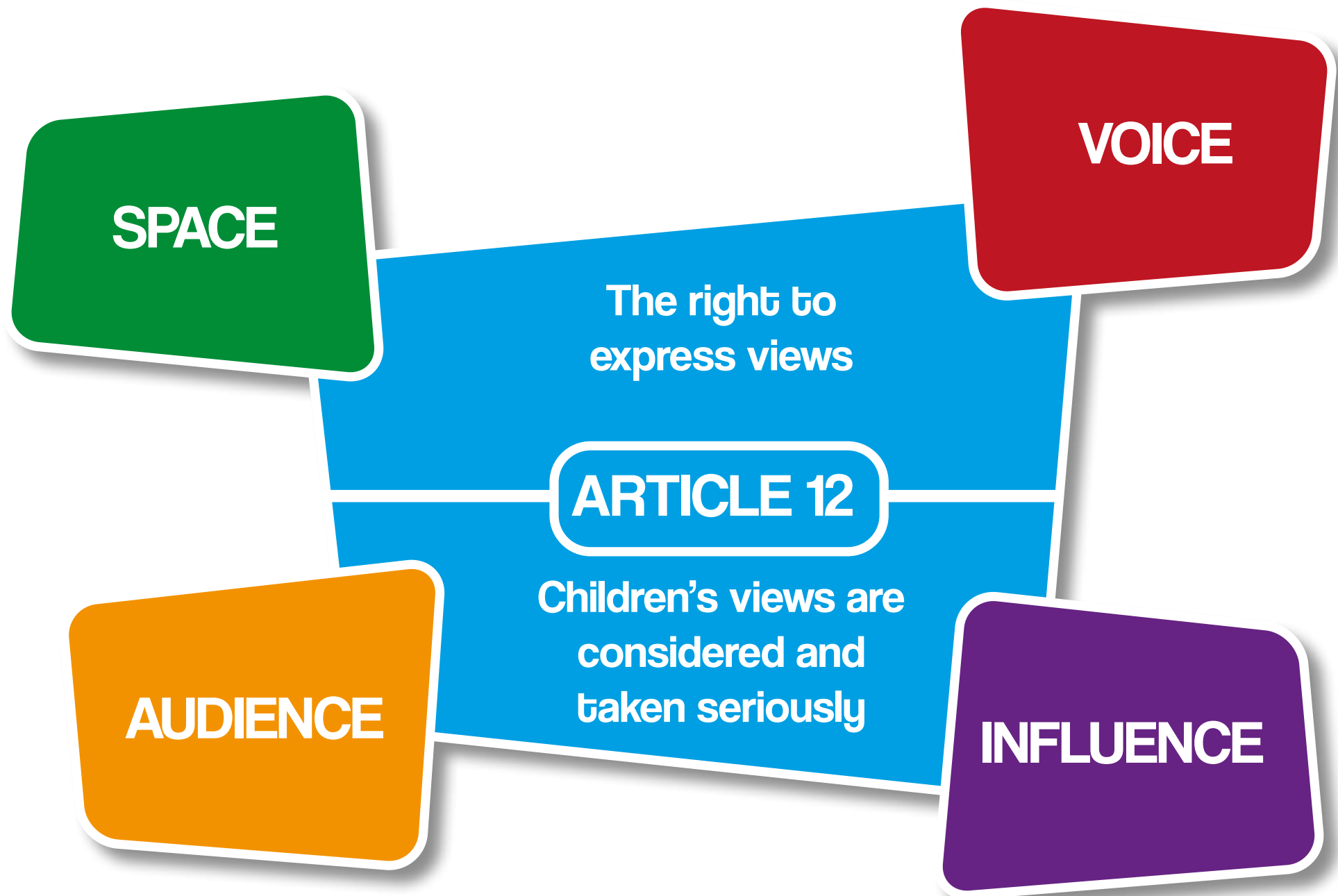


- Your decisions could take months, even years, to come into effect.
- You meet with different people, including other young people, staff and councillors to discuss, agree and design improvements.
- The result impacts young people in the future.



Models of participation

There are several models that can be helpful in thinking about how to involve children and young people in decision-making. We have decided to use the Lundy Model of Participation which focuses on the different parts of Article 12. There are four parts of this model: space, voice, influence and audience.



Checklist for the Lundy Model of Participation

We will train our staff to use this model when working with you.

Using our core values, we will make sure you are supported to understand what is being said, that your voice is heard and that you can give your opinions in any way you want. Time will be taken to explain who wants to hear your opinions and why they want to know them.

We will let you know how your opinions will be used and what happens next. Finally, we will ensure what you tell us will be taken seriously.

Space

HOW: Provide a safe and inclusive space for children to express their views.

- Have children's views been actively sought?
- Is there a safe space where children can express themselves freely?
- Have steps been taken to ensure all children can take part?

Voice

HOW: Provide appropriate information and facilitate the expression of children's views.

- Have the children been given the information they need to form a view?
- Do the children know that they do not have to take part?
- Have children been given a range of options as to how they might choose to express themselves?

Audience

HOW: Ensure that children's views are communicated to someone with the responsibility to listen.

- Is there a process for communicating children's views?
- Do children know who their views are being communicated to?
- Does that person/body have the power to make decisions?

Influence

HOW: Ensure children's views are taken seriously and acted upon, where appropriate.

- Were the children's views considered by those with the power to effect change?
- Are there procedures in place that ensure that the children's views have been taken seriously?
- Have children and young people been provided with feedback explaining the reasons for decisions taken?

Benefits of participation

A close-up photograph of two young girls with long hair, one with reddish-blonde and the other with blonde, smiling and hugging each other. They are wearing denim jackets. The background is a soft-focus outdoor setting with green foliage.

Benefits for you:

- Builds confidence and self-esteem.
- Learn and develop problem-solving, communication and planning skills that will help you in the future.
- Find and value your voice.
- Make new friends and meet different people.
- See the difference you make in the community.

Benefits for us:

- We create services that are better at meeting your needs.
- Contributes to building more effective, relevant and long-lasting public services.
- It challenges us to make how we work more inclusively.
- Strengthens accountability and clarity about what can and can't be achieved.

Areas you can influence:

We want you to have the freedom to think creatively about all the services that we provide and have opportunities to influence how we deliver them.

This might include:

- How our services work, how we evaluate what we do and how we measure our progress.
- How we communicate with you and other young people.
- The policies (plans and rules) that we write and work by .
- Our long-term strategic planning (things that take a longer time to complete).
- How we spend money.



How can you get involved?

You can speak to your school about joining your school council, the Torfaen Youth Forum or Torfaen Junior Forum.

You can also contact the council's Children and Young People's Engagement and Participation Officer Philip Wilson on philip.wilson@torfaen.gov.uk

Torfaen Youth Service works with young people aged between 11 and 25 and has lots of opportunities for you to participate and have your voice heard. Search Torfaen Youth Service on the Torfaen Council website.

The Torfaen Young People's Support Service gives children in care or care leavers the chance to have their say. Search Torfaen Young People's Support Service on the Torfaen Council website.

If you are a young carer, you can join the Young Carers Forum. Search Torfaen Young Carers on the Torfaen Council website.

The Inspire team works with young people at risk of leaving education early and supports them to get their voices heard. Search Inspire on the Torfaen Council website.

You can raise issues with your local county councillor. Find out who your local councillor is by visiting the Torfaen Council website.

If you are aged between 11 and 17 you can stand to become a member of the Welsh Youth Parliament or UK Youth Parliament.

Torfaen Youth Alliance

The Torfaen Youth Alliance brings together representatives from youth organisations in Torfaen to meet with policy-makers. The network meets three times a year. The following organisations are part of the alliance:

- Torfaen Youth Forum
- Torfaen Junior Forum
- Play Service
- Youth Service
- Crownbridge School
- Traveller Education Service
- Pupil referral unit
- Inspire Torfaen
- Torfaen Young People's Support Service
- Young Carers
- Cwmbran Centre for Young People
- TOGs Torfaen
- Aneurin Bevan University Health Board
- Gwent Regional Partnership Board
- Rebel Youth
- Welsh Youth Parliament
- Police and Crime Commissioner's Office
- St Giles Cymru
- Melin & Bron Afon Housing Associations
- Home Start Cymru
- Torfaen Housing Support
- Scouts Cymru

How will we check the strategy is working?

- All council departments will use the strategy to inform how they work.
- Services will complete the Children's Commissioner for Wales' self-evaluation form to show how they are listening to young people, and identify areas for improvement.
- Scrutiny committees will monitor how the strategy is being implemented.
- Young people will be invited to take part in scrutiny committee meetings.
- It will help the council to achieve its County Plan well-being objectives to encourage and champion children and young people to thrive.
- The council's annual report on service user perspectives will include information on how this strategy is being used to offer children and young people opportunities to have their voices heard and taken seriously.

What will success look like by 2025/7?

- Children and young people's participation training will be in place for all staff.
- The number of young people attending participation groups will have increased.
- All children and education services will have completed their first Children's Commissioner for Wales self-assessment form.
- We will have examples of how children and young people have influenced change.

Thank you

Thank you to the Torfaen Youth Forum and colleagues from across children and young people's services for their support and input into this strategy.

Credits

Lancashire County Council

(Children and Young People's Participation Strategy).

Leicester City Council

(Individual, operational, strategic diagram, summary of participation).

Listen-Act-Change

Council of Europe Handbook on children's participation.

Lundy Model of Participation

Participation Framework National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making (Government of Ireland).

