

# Hearing the voices of children and young people in Harrow

A **DRAFT** strategy for the active and meaningful participation  
of children and young people across Harrow Council

October 2005

**THIS IS A DRAFT DOCUMENT**

**Children's Services**  
**People First**  
Harrow Council

## **Foreword**

### **Hearing the voices of children and young people in Harrow**

This strategy is for the active and meaningful participation of children and young people across Harrow Council. This is a council wide strategy, led by Children Services but embracing all aspects of the Council's work. Inclusion of young people's views and opinions has already begun, and the benefits are now being seen by their communities - for example, through the recent Parks survey.

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## **Development of the Participation Strategy**

This (draft) participation strategy has been developed and written by a group of 15 young people, aged between 12 and 19 and living in Harrow, working alongside two participation co-ordinators and three participation workers employed by Harrow Council, and two independent consultants. The work has been ongoing since October 2004.

### **What is participation?**

Throughout this strategy, 'participation' is used to mean:

*"Sharing power with children and young people to ensure their right to take an active part in decision making; in the planning of services which affect their lives and in producing improved services"*

### **How was the strategy developed?**

This strategy is based directly on research carried out by the young people over a five-month period between November 2004 and March 2005.

A huge amount of time and effort was taken by the young people (and the workers supporting them) to ensure that a large number of children and young people were given the opportunity to feed in their ideas and to ensure that this process was meaningful. In total, they heard from over 100 children and young people via questionnaires, meetings, street interviews, schools, colleges, and through children's services about their views on council services and how they would like to be involved in the future. Additionally, the young people interviewed a range of adults, including teachers, police officers, and youth and social workers. They also interviewed 20 adults working across all the directorates of the council and some in the voluntary sector, an elected member and the Mayor.

### **How did previous experience inform the strategy?**

Previous experiences of good quality participation initiatives across the borough are also included as a basis for this strategy. For example, the Children's Fund has an effective website for young people, a young researchers project and ongoing opportunities for young people to be consulted about services provided to them by Children's Fund projects.

The 'Young Voices' group for Children Looked After have met regularly for the last two years, to monitor and be consulted on the services they receive.

As part of the mapping of stakeholders towards effective community engagement, existing information on community engagement channels across the council directorates will be consolidated into a directory. The directory, which will be available electronically, will be further informed by, and provide a resource for, the Children and Young People's Strategy.

The requirements of section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act have been in-bedded in all aspects of the preparation of this document.

## The duty to ensure participation

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was ratified by the UK in 1991, thus placing a number of duties and responsibilities on local government to promote and safeguard the rights of children and young people. Article 12 of the UNCRC gives children and young people the right to express their views on all matters that affect their lives and to have account taken of their views:

*“State parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child”*

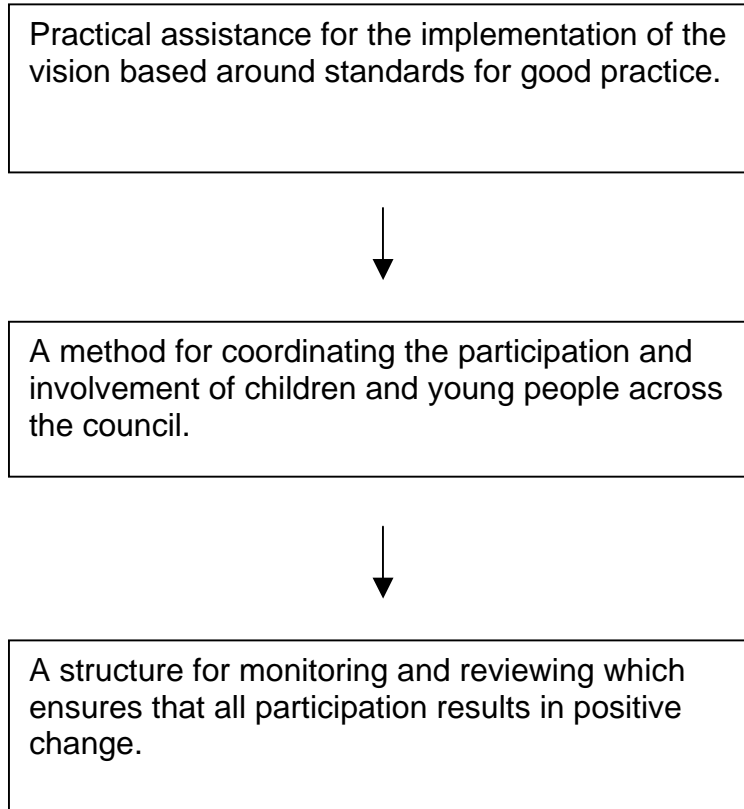
There has been an expectation placed on local authorities since the Children Act 1975 to give “due consideration” to the “ascertainable wishes and feelings of the child”. This was re-iterated in the Children Act 1989. Since the introduction of the Quality Protects Programme in 1999, which had the participation of children and young people as one of its priority areas, the government has led with a strong and clear agenda that promotes participation of service users, including children and young people.

Children and young people’s rights to participate are enshrined and/or recommended in a plethora of legislation, guidance, regulations and government review reports, some of the more recent of which include:

- 2002 Adoption and Children Act;
- 2002 Education Act;
- 2004 “Working together – giving children and young people a say”
- 2004 Children Act;
- 2004 National Service Framework (this is NOT an exhaustive list).

## The vision for participation

The vision is that, through meaningful engagement, children and young people can actively participate in all service planning and delivery across the Council. Whilst this strategy is initiated through the Council, it is hoped that it will also be embraced throughout Harrow Strategic Partnership. This strategy is designed to provide:



Participation is a central part of the Council delivering against its Corporate Priorities. It is fundamental to the themes of Strengthening Communities and Valuing Harrow's Customers. Participation is cross cutting throughout all aspects of the Council's operation.

In addition, the new national framework for Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA\*), which obliges the council to monitor and put in place arrangements to secure continual improvement of council performance and delivery to its service users, aims to test how well councils understand their local communities - with one of the themes for assessments being children and young people.

## The aims of participation

### **Voice ----- Influence ----- Action**

This strategy aims to ensure:

- that all children and young people are valued members of the community by:
  - providing opportunities to enable their direct participation in planning and delivery of services;
  - empowering them to take part in those opportunities;
  - listening and responding to their views, wishes, feelings and experiences;
- that the views and opinions of children and young people inform and influence the planning, development and delivery of all services provided for them;
- that children and young people are fully included in Harrow's future design and decision making and that action is taken as a result of their input;
- that the principle of participation is embedded into every aspect of work with and on behalf of children and young people;
- long term commitment and planning to the participation of children and young people.
- that robust means of feedback are developed to demonstrate to young people how and where their expressed views have been listened to and have influenced the council's actions.

## Code of conduct for participation

All participation and involvement of children and young people must meet a range of quality standards and the **Harrow Code of Practice on Consultation** if it is to have positive outcomes for children, young people and the Council.

Participation and involvement must be:

- **Visible** – the council’s **commitment** to the active participation of children and young people must be **clearly stated and openly available** for staff, managers, members and children and young people. It has to be seen to be **everyone’s responsibility** in all areas of their work and needs **strong leadership** (by example) from the top.
- **Valued** – the contribution children and young people can play needs to be viewed **positively and respectfully**. They should be involved from the beginning right through to the end of any initiative and clear feedback must be given about what has happened with their input. They should be part of **identifying outcomes** at the beginning and **evaluating the work** at the end. **Change, improvements and action** must result from all participation. Where change is not possible, clear, honest and accessible explanations must be given. Children and young people’s participation can only be truly valued if there is a move towards **sharing power** with them.
- **Resourced** – effective participation requires **time, skills, and support**, which may require extra **funding**. Initiatives that attempt participation without adequate resources will fail to provide the Council with the information and outcomes it requires and will feel exploitative to children and young people.
- **Accessible** – a **range of ways** for children and young people to be involved need to be established, meeting their ages, abilities, life experiences, time restraints, cultural backgrounds, interest levels, other responsibilities etc. **All children and young people** have the right to the opportunity to be involved. Steps should be taken to ensure that no child or young person is discriminated against within the range of opportunities on offer for their participation. Consideration should be given to ensure that participation initiatives are culturally sensitive, show due regard to age and ability, and meet the needs of children and young people who do not use English as a first language. Children and young people have the right to define themselves and opportunities to demonstrate their abilities. Assumptions and judgements should not be made based on their age, abilities or ways of presenting themselves. **Full information** needs to be made available about the task (the possible outcomes, the time length, the rewards, the opportunities for learning, etc) for children and young people to ensure that they are making **informed decisions** about their involvement. It may also be necessary to seek informed **consent** from those responsible for caring for younger children. It will become standard practice to implement appropriate information sharing arrangements, protocols and consent processes for all consultation/participation events to ensure compliance with data protection, Safeguarding aims and the Crime and Disorder Act.
- **Creative** – “real” participation requires a **change** in the way that “things are done”. This may well include taking **informed risks** and trying things out to ensure that children and young people are truly involved and included. Participation opportunities need to operate within a child’s timetable, i.e. it is likely that this will be after school, at weekends and/or during school holidays. Mediums more immediately accessible to children and young people (such as I.T) should also be used.



- **Rewarding** – children and young people should be **rewarded and celebrated for their time, commitment, ideas and hard work**, especially in situations where an adult would be paid for the same task. Rewards should be **realistic, varied and creative**, and designed to meet the needs of the individuals involved. They may include learning opportunities, new skills, accredited learning, references, work experience, pay, vouchers, outings, the opportunity to see things change etc. Children and young people should be **involved in deciding the rewards** they will receive
- **Safe** – any possible risks to the **physical or emotional safety** of children and young people should be thoroughly explored before they become involved (this process may be undertaken with them). Impact Assessments on activities in terms of safety and equalities will be implemented to meet obligations under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act, Health and Safety Act and equalities legislation. **Expectations** for both the Council and the children and young people should be **openly agreed** at the outset, along with any **limitations or boundaries** to outcome or involvement, to ensure that the experience is positive for children and young people and that they do not feel exploited and tokenised at the end. **Adequate support and training** should be given to **children and young people** to ensure that they can be confidently involved. Training and support should also be given to **staff** involved in participation initiatives to ensure that they are ready, informed and skilled for the task. Clear processes for children and young people to use if they have a complaint arising out of their experience of participation need to be put in place.
- **Led by children and young people** – opportunities should be made readily accessible for children and young people to **set their agenda** for change, not simply respond to that of the Council. **Structures** for children and young people to voice their concerns and **raise the issues** most pressing for them need to be set in place, and equal value placed on meeting those needs as is placed on meeting the requirements of the Council.
- **Powerful** – if participation is to be most effective it has to produce action and change. In order for change to happen, the process and the **children and young people** involved have to be **invested with some power** and they need to have **access to people** in powerful positions, who will support them.
- **Reviewed** – at the conclusion of any piece of participation it is important to **evaluate** the work undertaken and for **children and young people to be fully involved** in that process. The **outcomes** (changes/improvements) arising out of all participation should be **fed back** to as wide a group of service users as possible - not just the young people directly involved with the work. **Lessons learnt** from the evaluation should be used to inform future participation initiatives.

## **The way forward**

During the development of this strategy, it became evident that there was a need for increased awareness and understanding of participation both within the council and the community of children and young people in Harrow. One of the most important aspects of implementing participation is achieving a change in attitudes and behaviour, where needed, towards children and young people. To this end, a rolling programme of training will be devised to deliver a skilled and knowledgeable workforce to meet the aims of the strategy.

An initial training programme will be rolled out across the council for elected members, managers and staff. This will cover:

- Understanding participation – working alongside children and young people;
- Developing practical ideas for participation;
- Practical implementation of the Children and Young People's Strategy;
- Reviewing, monitoring and evaluating participation.

The training will be designed to meet the needs of participants as related to their roles and responsibilities within the council and to children and young people. It will be mandatory training, thereby showing corporate commitment to children and young people's participation.

The training will be over two days, with the first day spent in mixed groups of practitioners, managers and members across all directorates, which gives participants the opportunity to share experience and begins to build integrated working around participation throughout the council. The second day will be spent working on more localised action planning. Both days training will be co-facilitated by adults and young people trainers. More young people will work alongside the adult participants to develop the local action plans on the second training day.

Concurrently, there is a need for widespread information to be made available to the children and young people of Harrow via a range of appropriate mediums, to inform them of the council's commitment and the action it is taking as well as to raise their awareness of their right to participate.

## Action plan for implementation of the Children and Young People's Participation Strategy

This action plan is designed to provide a corporate approach for the implementation of the strategy, which will work for a diverse set of professionals providing a range of services affecting the lives of children and young people. The action plans for each service or team have deliberately not been prescribed here. It is a requirement of quality participation practice that they be developed at a local level with children and young people who are users of that particular service. Involving all elected members, managers, staff and children and young people in the development of action plans encourages greater creativity, understanding and ownership – all basic requirements of a participation strategy.

The range and level of involvement of children and young people will obviously vary across the Directorates within the council. However, there should not be any area of Council where children and young people could not play an active and meaningful part in the designed development and delivery of services.

There is already evidence of good quality participation initiatives across the Council that illustrate the benefits of participation:

- **Development of the strategy:** This is based directly on the research carried out by young people over a period of months.
- **The Youth Council Conference:** The conference brought together young people from across the borough to discuss common issues, problems and concerns and to put these to service providers for them to act upon. Three sub groups under the Apsig umbrella evolved from this:
  - Crime and safety
  - Health sports and leisure
  - Education

Apsig creates a forum for young people, professionals and Councillors to come together to plan new initiatives for tackling the above.

- **Harrow Parks consultation projects:** 357 children and young people were asked their views on Parks and outdoor leisure activities in Harrow, and a child-friendly version of the findings have been published. The recommendations of the consultation will be incorporated into future council planning. There have already been major improvements in response to the recommendations.
- **User feedback survey:** In February '05, young service users throughout Harrow were asked for their views and experience of the services they received. Findings of the report have already been incorporated into the new Children's Services plan.
- **Safer Harrow Youth Survey:** In July 2004 a survey was carried out in partnership with Harrow Council Youth service and the Safer Harrow Partnership. The survey included responses from 250 young people and was used to inform the Safer Harrow Crime and Drugs Strategy.

- **Young Voices Group:** A group of children and young people ‘Looked After’ by the council meet regularly to review and monitor the services they receive. They have participated in the recruitment of advocates, the named nurse for children looked after and social workers. Through this meaningful engagement, the young people have been instrumental in planning and developing services and have developed their own resource materials for reviewing their care and promoting healthy living.
- **The Children’s Fund:** The Children’s Fund has an effective website for young people, a young researchers project and ongoing opportunity for young people to be consulted about services provided to them by the Children’s Fund projects.

In order to build on these good practices, we must ensure that:

- The strategy is fully embraced as one of the mechanisms of enabling young people in Harrow to **VOICE** out freely on matters concerning them, to be able to **INLUENCE** decisions on issues affecting them and to ensure that decision and policy makers **ACT** on the outcomes of consultations.

In order for the council to achieve an effective implementation of its Seven Point Strategic Plan, (which is made up of the five outcomes of Every Child Matters; the Children’s Trust Approach and the National Service Framework) the responsibility for delivery on this strategy has to be seen as **everyone’s responsibility**. Clear leadership for the strategy needs to be given by the Council, with a commitment made on behalf of all Directorates and services and an expectation that each Directorate and team makes their own visible commitment to the strategy and plan for its delivery. As a core part of this commitment, the Council should formally endorse the UNCRC (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989).

Children and young people in Harrow are clearly fundamental stakeholders within this strategy, and therefore need to be informed, encouraged, enabled and supported to help in its delivery.

The Participation Advisory Group (see Appendix 2) and the Community Engagement Link Officers network will provide co-ordination and support for the delivery of the strategy.

## **Reviewing the Children and Young People’s Participation Strategy**

The Participation Advisory Group will be responsible for monitoring and reviewing the day to day operation of the strategy across the council.

A Children and Young People’s Participation Monitoring Group will evaluate and scrutinise overall implementation of the strategy (see Appendix Three).

## **Appendix One – Links to existing plans and strategies**

The participation of children and young people is a central and underlying theme in most current existing plans and strategies, both locally and nationally. In order for the council to successfully deliver within the five outcomes of Every Child Matters; the Children's Trust Approach or the National Service Framework as set out within Harrow's Seven Point Strategic Plan, the participation of children, young people and families has to be developed, increased and sustained.

Participation is a thread that runs throughout the Seven Point Strategic Plan either as a stated target or implicit in the nature of the plans for service delivery. For example, an objective that children and young people will engage in decision making is clearly stated within intended outcome of "making a positive difference". Likewise there is a commitment to a child centred, outcome-led vision which is informed by the views of children and young people.

It would be impossible to deliver the vision contained within the Seven Point Strategic Plan without the children and young people's participation being integral throughout all planning and delivery of services.

The Youth Forum in Harrow is currently developing a strategy for young people on participation in line with UK Youth Parliament practice. Objectives for their strategy will be linked to the plans outlined in this document.

Local authorities across the country are beginning to use the Hear By Right Standards (developed by the National Youth Agency) as a way of auditing, reviewing and planning their participation activities. The objectives from these Standards, combined with national and local good practice, have been woven into this strategy.

The strategy for engaging children and young people is an integral part of the council's overall Community Engagement Strategy (CES), which looks to coordinate and enhance engagement activities across the council and improve the quality of life for residents. This initiative contributes to the council's engagement aim of delivering further activities which involve and collaborate with target groups, rather than simply consult.

The strategy for engaging with children and young people will inform the Community Engagement Strategy in the following ways:

- The Code of Conduct and recommendations established through the Children and young people strategy will be incorporated in the council's corporate protocol for community engagement, which will outline minimum requirements for any engagement activity of the council.

- A comprehensive and fully participatory training programme will contribute to the CES aim to provide capacity building within the council to better understand and engage with residents.
- The Inspection Group which will monitor progress on the Children Young People's action plan will be one of the council's mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation the council's CE overall.
- Officers involved in the children and young people's participation activities will share information and contribute to the overall picture of community engagement via the planned CE Link Officers network and log of community engagement activities.

## **Appendix Two – The Participation Advisory Group**

### **Composition of the Participation Advisory Group**

The group will comprise the two participation co-ordinators and three participation workers, and five of the young people responsible for the development of this strategy.

### **Aims of the Participation Advisory Group**

- To co-ordinate participation activity and helping to achieve optimum service delivery whilst avoiding duplication of effort/events
- To provide guidance and a multi-disciplinary overview to participation
- To identify and promote the benefits of participation within planning and everyday operations
- To ensure participation planning reflects the council's core values and corporate aims and objectives

### **Objectives of the Participation Advisory Group**

- To provide independent advice, guidance and practical support
- To draft statements of policy and good practice
- To contribute to the provision of information by children and young people about how services are provided and options for the future, through (for example):
  - Meetings for debates
  - Discussions and other open forums
  - Events
  - Newsletters
  - Website
- To provide forums to discuss issues of local needs and acknowledge good practice
- To provide an overview on policy proofing practices
- To develop a sustainable means of mapping participation across the council
- To maintain an overview of training and development need
- To facilitate organisational learning (including a rolling programme of training which is linked to professional development and competencies and the production of a participation implementation pack) to allow for the development of positive participative opportunities by children and young people
- To evaluate and monitor how participation is being implemented across the council, how the views of children and young people are being used and how outcomes are fed back to them
- To monitor allocation and investment of resources to ensure equality of opportunity, diversity and fair access for all children and young people within participation initiatives.

## **Appendix Three – The Children and Young People’s Participation Monitoring Group**

### **Composition of the group**

This group will have a maximum of 20 members and will be comprised of, young people (age 12 upwards) and elected members.

### **Purpose of the group**

The group will meet four times a year, with a remit to maintain an overview of the participatory activities taking place across the council and to monitor quality. Directorates will be expected to make presentations to the group about their progress in terms of the participation of children and young people. The National Youth Agency “Hear By Right Standards” provide a useful tool for the audit of participation activities, by providing seven Standards by which to report back and evaluate progress (Shared values; structure; systems; staff, members and trustees; skills and knowledge; style of leadership and strategy).

The group would look specifically for:

- Evidence of listening
- Evidence of planning
- Evidence of change

These would then be evaluated against the Code of Conduct for participation contained in this strategy. They would also expect to hear directly from children and young people involved in the participatory activities about their experience, and would be looking for presentations given jointly by young people and adults

The group would have the power to issue (or remove) “kite marks” for teams, service areas or directorates they feel are responding to the challenge of meaningfully involving children and young people, with quality processes as evaluated against the Code of Conduct.

The group would also be responsible for review of the overall strategy itself using the template provided by the NYA “Hear By Right Standards” (Strategy standard). It will make recommendations for updating and amendments in the light of the evidence provided to them around implementation.

The group would be required to produce yearly reports for council wide circulation (including for children and young people) about:

- The range of participation activities going on
- The group’s assessment of quality
- Kite Marks awarded or removed
- Lessons learnt during the previous six months about active participation

More specific terms of reference for the group would need to be established by the group itself in keeping with good participative practice, rather than be prescribed within this policy.



## Appendix Four – Action Plan

The implementation of this Action plan will have a start date of agreement from Cabinet. From this time the aims and objectives will be reviewed on a quarterly basis. Training will be integrated with existing Member and Staff training programmes.

Stage	Action	Content	Provider	Organised by	How	Time scales (following implementation of Strategy)
1	Council to endorse UNCRC					At next council meeting
2	Undertake mapping exercise	To gather information about participation activities currently in operation across the council		PAT	By distribution of questionnaire and follow up interviews where necessary	4 months
3	Provide training for YP	Participation training, enabling them to work on the aims of the strategy and training for trainers	Training to be integrated into existing training programmes.	PAT	Young people to attend course for the necessary duration	6 months rolling programme
4	Establish Participation Monitoring Group (PMG)	20 members – elected members and young people		PAT & Youth Forum	Develop terms of reference and standards based on Code of Conduct to evaluate participation and award “Kite” marks	6 Months

5	Develop participation training materials & strategy implementation pack	Materials to raise awareness, understanding and practical implementation of participation	Young people trainers & PAT	PAT		3-6 months
6	Harrow wide distribution of information for children & young people	To inform young people of their right to participate and to alert them to upcoming opportunities		PAT & young people	Distributed as widely as possible, ensuring information is fully accessible	3 months
7	Provide joined-up training across the council for EM, SM & FLS	What is Participation? And the Community Engagement training for officers and members	Young people trainers & PAT	PAT	Rolling programme across departments	6 month rolling programme
8	SM and EM corporate commitment to participation	Public statement which signs up to the strategy and to the code of conduct		EM & SM	EM & SM to develop wording which states commitment & demonstrates understanding of why participation is important	1 Months
9	Second Phase training with individual teams/services	To develop localised action plans that will address implementation of strategy locally including statement of commitment/ intention	Young people trainers & PAT & young people users of relevant service	PAT	Rolling programme for different departments	6 month rolling programme

<b>10</b>	Second Phase training for SM and EM	To create individual and corporate action plans and review localised/team action plans	Young people trainers & PAT & young people users of relevant service	PAT	SM & EM action plans to include how they will support localised/team action plans	6 month rolling programme
<b>11</b>	Managers to disseminate action plan to FLS	Ensure a linkage of plans which are mutually supportive, realistic and achievable		SM and PAT	FLS to give feedback on SM/PAT action plans to PMG	6 Months
<b>12</b>	PMG to look at action plans	To make comments and suggestions about the plans		PAT to support PMG	To give written or verbal feedback	6 Months
<b>13</b>	PAT to work alongside SM, EM and FLS on participatory issues	Consultation and advice	PAT	ALL	Via: forums, individual support, access to materials etc	On going
<b>14</b>	Review progress of services on a regular basis with FLS, SM and EM	Is the service following their action plan What extra support is needed New ideas / goals?		PAT & Service representatives	Using action plan look at progress made and provide support where necessary	Stages 3 Months 6 Months 9 Months 12 Months from initial development

<b>15</b>	Teams, SM & EM to prepare reports	Combined service reports detailing participation activities and implementation of action plans – successes, lessons learnt & young people feedback		Services required to report back to this six monthly meeting of committee	Rotational across the council which sees each service reporting back every six months	6 Monthly
<b>16</b>	Reports/plan presented to PMG	Presentation of reports by services providers and service users to PMG	Service FLS & SM	PMG supported by PAT	PMG to give feedback and decide on award of “Kite Marks”	3 Months
<b>17</b>	PMG to provide report of their findings	Feedback of participation activities underway, progress on action plans, successes and lessons learnt across the council – Kite marks awarded		PMG	Via: e-mail newsletter, websites, distribution of young people accessible information	After each PMG meeting
<b>18</b>	Annual review of strategy by PMG	Using reports to PMG to evaluate and update strategy		PMG		Annually
<b>19</b>	Strategy annually reviewed by SMT and Council	Use committee and service reports to evaluate strategy and other corporate action plans		EM & SM		Annually

# A CHARTER FOR PARTICIPATION

- Participation recognises **children and young people's rights**.
- Children and young people are the present and the future. They have a right to **express themselves freely** and **feel good about themselves**.
- Children and young people use services and provisions in Harrow, but have a different **view of these services**, which is needed for their **improvement**.
- Children and young people can provide **creative ideas and solutions** about things that affect them.
- Children and young people in Harrow have a right to **full and active involvement** in planning and decision making.
- Planning of services should include young people's opinions as it is their **right to be heard** (Article 12 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child).
- By creating a positive environment for children and young people to participate, it helps young people to know that **their views are valued**. It creates good vibes that workers can benefit from.
- All children have the right to information in a **format that they can understand**.
- Actively involving children and young people helps the Council to design services that **accurately meet their needs**.
- Accurately designed services are better value for money as they target services and resources to **where they are needed most**.

**WITH RIGHTS COMES RESPONSIBILITY**

