

<b>LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN</b>	<b>WARDS:</b> All
<b>REPORT TITLE</b> Stocktake on Camden’s approach to participation and co-production with children and families	
<b>REPORT OF</b> Councillor Marcus Boyland, Cabinet Member for Best Start for Children and Families	
<b>FOR SUBMISSION TO</b> Children, Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee	<b>DATE</b> 08 October 2024
<b>SUMMARY OF REPORT</b> Involving everyone in achieving our shared vision is at the heart of our ‘We make Camden’ strategy. As part of Camden’s commitment to ensure every child has the best start in life, we want to make sure that every child and young person feels seen and heard.  This report sets out the steps we are taking to put children, young people’s and families’ views and wishes at the heart of Camden’s children’s services, outlines some areas where participation and co-production might be strengthened and highlights issues for discussion.  <b>Local Government Act 1972 – Access to Information</b>  No documents that require listing have been used in the preparation of this report’.  <b>Contact Officer:</b> Nana Bonsu, Director of Relational Practice Children and Learning London Borough of Camden 5 Pancras Square, London, N1C 4AG 020 7974 4444; Nana.Bonsu@camden.gov.uk	
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>  The Committee is asked to comment on and note the report.	

Signed:



Tim Aldridge, Executive Director, Children and Learning

Date: 27<sup>th</sup> September 2024

## 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. This report introduces Camden's new Centre for Relational Practice. It provides an overview of participation in Camden's children's services, a key focus area for the new Centre. It invites the Committee's reflections on Camden's participation journey in children's services and seeks feedback on proposals to strengthen and support participation practice. This will be led by the Centre for Relational Practice, building on and extending the many examples of good practice described in this report.

## 2. Background

- 2.1 The new Camden Centre for Relational Practice is a new research and practice centre focused on relational cultures in public services: its mission is to make relational cultures in public services a common practice for the common good. The new Director of Relational Practice, Nana Bonsu, joined Camden in June 2024 and is leading the development of plans for the new Centre as well as one practice model for all staff in Children and Learning. Participation is one of the four core methods of the new systemic relational practice framework, alongside mentalisation, anti-racist and restorative methods.
- 2.2 Since 2017, Camden has been on a journey to create new ways of collaborating with citizens and communities. Through citizens assemblies, our citizen led-wellbeing index, and participatory grant making, Camden has seen the difference that can be made when we put communities, citizens and partners at the heart of thinking about the most challenging issues our borough faces. Resident involvement underpins the missions, challenges and outcomes of 'We Make Camden'.
- 2.3 Camden's children's services have also had a strong focus on participation. For example, Camden have pioneered Family Group Conferencing, family-led decision making in which the family and friends network come together to plan for a child. This is a well established service and we are working to ensure that family meetings become a routine part of our engagement with all families we work with. Since 2020, Camden have also hosted an annual 'To Love is to Act' event, which is facilitated by residents, and brings together national stakeholders to look at how to challenge the idea that love, and public service are incompatible. We Make Camden, Camden's partnership vision, also has a commitment to make Camden a borough where every child has the best start in life: from ensuring that every child at risk feels seen and heard, to equipping our Camden young people to be a generation of leaders and change makers.
- 2.4 Children's rights to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously are enshrined in Article 12 of the United Convention on the Rights of the Child, a binding international treaty ratified by the UK in 1991. At a local level, Directors and Lead Members of Children's Services are required by statutory guidance to have regard to the General Principles of the Convention and to

ensure that children and young people are involved in the development and delivery of local services. Camden is currently working with the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families to build capacity for rights-compliant children's participation using the 'Lundy model of participation'<sup>1</sup>.

- 2.5 The 2022 Independent Review of children's social care by Josh MacAlister was informed by extensive engagement with children and young people, as well as by visits to local areas including Camden<sup>2</sup>. The government's improvement programme - 'Stable Homes Built on Love' – includes a range of measures which aim to strengthen children and family's participation in children's social care, including elements of the Championing Kinship Care programme, the Working Together to Safeguard Children revised guidance 2023, and the Children's Social Care National Framework.
- 2.6 The quality of Camden's work in this area has been recognised in inspections including Ofsted's November 2023 focused visit to children's services, Ofsted's inspection of Camden local authority children's services (2022), and HMI Probation's inspection of youth offending services in Camden (2020).
- 2.7 The committee will have the opportunity to consider participation in relation to special educational needs and disabilities provision as part of its consideration of the SEND Annual Report in early 2025. Participation in SEND services is therefore not included in this report.

### 3. **Stocktake: how do children's services involve children and families in matters that affect them?**

- 3.1 The report provides an overview of current participation activity including the ways in which services support children, parents and caregivers to participate in decisions which directly affect their lives, in informing and influencing services, and how they are supported to participate in shaping the community around them.
- 3.2 It starts with early help and family hubs, then considers statutory children's services, children and young people in our care and those who are care-experienced, children and young people with disabilities, and the integrated youth service. There are many participation initiatives underway and planned: this report will not cover them all but focuses on those that are established and ongoing. The focus is on council services, recognising there is much good practice across the broader Camden partnership.

### 3.3 **Children and families supported by early help and family hubs**

**Early help** work with parents and caregivers is underpinned by the resilient families model. The Good Help manifesto - co-produced in 2021 with Camden parents, the Early Help service and the University of the Arts London - is

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<sup>1</sup> [Enabling the meaningful participation of children and young people globally: The Lundy Model | Research | Queen's University Belfast \(qub.ac.uk\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Independent review of children's social care: final report - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

informing the current service redesign. Children in families supported by early help are consulted with parental consent, and school age children are supported to attend Team around the Family meetings, advocate for themselves and contribute to the plan. The service has co-produced a form with children to help capture children's wishes and feelings.

The design of Camden's **Family Hubs** programme has been informed by engagement with families from the start, drawing on the co-produced Good Help Manifesto, surveys, focus groups and the input of the well-established parent champion's programme. Development of the service offer has drawn on a 2023 survey shared with over 160 families. User engagement research in 2024 has supported the redesign of the families website, a communications strategy and the expansion of services to children of all ages.

### **3.4 Multi-agency safeguarding, children in need, child protection**

The **multi-agency safeguarding hub** aims to make timely decisions around risk to children and timely support. Following a referral, children's wishes and feelings are explored in either directly over the phone, or through partners such as schools. Parents are contacted to discuss help and intervention.

The wishes and feelings of **children involved in child protection processes** are explored in several ways. Children complete consultation forms with social workers prior to child protection conferences, and children are invited to attend depending on age and development. For legal planning and public law outline meetings, the child's voice is shared by the network around them and children have a guardian and solicitor at court. Children are seen and spoken to by their Independent Reviewing Officer during their child looked after reviews. Children's views are sought during case audits if age appropriate. Young people who are care leavers have pathway plan review meetings at least every six months as well as a statutory visit every 2-3 months with their personal adviser. The 'Mind of My Own' app will be rolled out this autumn after a successful pilot. It allows children to communicate their wishes and feelings at a time and in a way that they choose, in an age-appropriate way.

To enable **parents and caregivers' effective involvement in child protection processes**, officers meet parents before conferences, and interpreters are arranged if required. Independent Reviewing Officers liaise with parents prior to child looked after reviews. Parents' and carers' views are sought in case audits and in practice week. There is an advocacy offer for any parent or carer who requests it, and Camden and the London Family Group Conference has created an accredited qualification in parent advocacy, with 12 parents with lived experience trained, and 120 parents supported by spring 2024. Camden's Safeguarding Family Group Conference pilot, in partnership with the University of Exeter, is exploring how we build on family strengths and collaborate with families in response to child protection concerns.

### **3.5 Children we care for and care experienced young people**

Camden made care-experience a locally protected characteristic in January 2024 and have launched a cross-council programme of work to refresh

**Camden's Corporate Parenting Strategy.** Young people with care experience are helping to shape priorities through workshops. The new strategy will include an approach to co-production going forward and provides an opportunity to respond to the feedback from an April 2024 visit by the National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers, Mark Riddell, which included a workshop with care-experienced young people.

Camden's **Children in Care Council** for children aged 11 – 17 years meets monthly, with a range of different events attended by between 5 and 20 children. CiCC representatives attend Corporate Parenting Board, and a range of other events, such as the Camden debate on making care-experience a protected characteristic and the All-Party Parliamentary Group.

As part of work to support young adults who are care experienced, Camden has been exploring options during 2024, including a young people's panel model. Work is underway to develop a way of engaging with care experienced young people that works well for them. The panel runs alongside regular weekly drop ins and the Pocket PA App codesigned with young people and currently being upgraded to enable two-way communication.

### **3.6 Children and young people's disability service**

This service provides a social work and social care services for children and young people with complex needs and disabilities.

**Social workers** use a communications pack to help understand children's wishes and feelings based on advice from schools and other settings on children's preferred communication method.

For children where a social worker is not allocated, the service is moving to a **named worker model** to allow a greater focus on the voice of the child and family in developing plans. Parents contribute to care plans and participate in short breaks panels. Short breaks provision includes many activities based in the local community.

The **Reactive Forum** is a project for disabled young people with mild to moderate learning disabilities. Between 16 and 22 young people attend each month. It supports them to have a say about services and strategy. Recent activities include focus groups on health services, involvement in commissioning short-break services and designing and delivering Disability Awareness training to youth workers.

The council commissions the organisation Kids to coordinate the **Special Parents Forum** on behalf of parents and attends meetings to present and provide information on agendas set by its 350 parent members.

The annual **Preparing for Adulthood event** is co-produced with parents based on their areas of interest and attended by nearly 150 parents. 2024's event opened with 6 young people talking about their aspirations.

### 3.7 Involving young people and parents/caregivers in improving a range of services in children's social care

The **Young Inspectors** programme was introduced fifteen years ago. Each year, around six young people aged between 16 and 25 who have experience of having a social worker in Camden undertake research into the views of service users and professionals about the services provided by social care and partner agencies responsible for safeguarding children. Recent programmes include children and families experience of social care meetings (2023), kinship care support (2022) and the young people's pathway (2021). The inspection report is presented to the Children, Schools and Families Scrutiny Committee. An action plan is drawn up to address the report recommendations and is overseen by the Quality Assurance Board.

The **Family Advisory Board** was established in 2014. All members have lived experience with Family Group Conferences or children's services in Camden. Monthly meetings are attended by 10 to 12 regular members, and provide a platform for sharing and learning, participation, inclusion, and involvement in service design. The board is expanding membership to young people with experience of children's social care and adults with social care experience.

### 3.8 Integrated Youth Service

The service supports a range of participation activities, ranging from a universal offer for all children and young people in Camden, to more focused work with groups of children including those supported by the Youth Justice Service.

Camden's **Youth Council** is open to 13 to 19-year-olds and young people can apply to join at any time.

The borough's **Youth MPs and Deputy Youth MPs** are the voice for Camden over their two-year term, seeking to put forward their interests in local decision-making, as well as representing the views and interests of local young people at regional and national level through the UK Youth Parliament.

Camden's annual **Camden Shout Out** in November offers the opportunity for primary and secondary pupils to present their ideas on a range of topical issues directly to local politicians and senior officers from the Council.

Camden also used a Citizen Assembly model to inform its **Youth Assembly**. The 2024 Camden Youth Assembly will focus on young women and safety, following a discussion on this topic in 2023.

The **detached youth team** use a range of methods to ensure that services remain child centred: including co-design, regular surveys, focus groups, feedback on the programme and anonymous feedback boxes. Young people play an active role in designing the team's sessions. The **Young Guardians**

project supports capacity and leadership development for young people to influence community safety.

The **youth early help and youth hubs** offer is developed in consultation with young people. It supports youth forums and regular engagement for young people with local service providers. The service also supports **the Stop and Search Youth Advisory Group** which informs decisions about safety, stop and search policies and develops peer-led education programmes.

Young people using the **Careers and Connexions services** get support to make informed decisions about their future. The service offer is informed by feedback from young people gathered as part of service accreditation.

The **Count Me in Project** is an inclusive project for young people with mild to moderate learning disabilities in partnership at Somers Town Youth Centre. It aims to enable young people build and gain skills social, communication and independence skills within a mainstream youth setting.

### 3.9 The Youth Justice Service

**Youth Justice Service** support is developed in discussion with individual children about their needs. The team seeks regular feedback from individual children on specific reparations projects with a combination of survey questions and open discussion. Once a child finishes their orders, they are invited to provide feedback through an anonymous exit questionnaire, supported by a peer advocate where possible.

In addition, **peer advocates** provide feedback and attend the Youth Justice Board, based on their experience and informed gathered from other children through regular surveys. Children have been involved in redesigning the new reception area, with a new You Said, We Did notice board to show how the service has responded to feedback.

Each of the main programmes through the Youth Justice service (Camden Summer University; Avalon project; Duke of Edinburgh; Honest Grind Coffee) support children to choose support and opportunities that reflect their interests. All have feedback mechanisms to shape service delivery.

## 4. Children and families' participation: looking forwards

4.1 As outlined above, there are many strengths in current practice, including

- the commitment of senior leaders (both elected and officers) to seeking out and responding to children and families' views and experiences
- a bedrock of good practice in responding to the voice of the child and working with families, reflected in inspection reports
- well established programmes such as the Young Inspectors and Family Action Board, alongside new and innovative programmes
- the skills and enthusiasm of staff across Children and Learning, supported by a Participation Unit, and the Participation and Engagement Group (PEG)– a

six-weekly forum where staff can share learning and practice on participation. Recent topics include learning about the voice of the child from audits and peer observations, alignment of corporate participation and children's participation, and exploring antiracist participation practice. This staff-led group is steering Camden's approach to the Lundy Model (see paragraph 2.3 above). Feedback from forum members highlights the value of learning to practice across different services:

*“One of the most helpful aspects of the PEG is that practitioners have come together from right across the practice system to pool ideas about what participation means in their service and where we think things need to improve. It's really helpful to get a sense of what is happening in other services. A rewarding and developmental aspect for me has been creating a space where we put our children and families at the centre, thinking together about how we truly raise their voice and how we raise the profile of participation amongst practitioners. It has been particularly exciting to link with partners from the Anna Freud centre and consider how we can bring a conceptual framework to the philosophy of participation, that is easy to understand and which we are working on together, across service boundaries, across the practice system”.* Children looked after social worker

#### **4.2 Proposed next steps include**

- Using the Centre for Relational Practice to strengthen governance and oversight of participation approaches and ensure continuous development of participation practice.
- Identifying gaps, ensuring effective equality monitoring across all participation work, and building skills so participation becomes more inclusive, reflects our commitment to anti-racism, recognises intersectionality and enables children of different ages and with communications needs to make their wishes and feelings known
- Strengthening continuous feedback between practitioners, leaders and residents we serve, with a more robust approach to oversight of participation activity and capturing the difference it makes to residents.

#### **5. Questions for discussion**

We would welcome the Committee's feedback to shape next steps:

- What has struck you about the stocktake in this paper?
- What do Committee members think about the proposed next steps outlined above?
- Are there are additional areas to cover or issues to consider?

#### **6. Finance Comments of the Executive Director Corporate Services**

The Executive Director of Corporate Resources has been consulted and has no comment to make in the context of this report.



**7. Legal Comments of the Borough Solicitor**

The Borough Solicitor has been consulted on the contents of this report and does not have a comment to add to the report.

**8. Environmental Implications**

There are no environmental impacts of this report.

**9. Appendices**

None.

**REPORT ENDS**