

THE VOICE OF THE CHILD STRATEGY



Cyngor
Gwynedd

The Voice of the Learner in Children's Services

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THE VOICE OF THE LEARNER IN CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Purpose of the Appendix

The purpose of this appendix to demonstrate, in a clear and practical way, how the voices, lived experience, wishes and feelings of children and young people feed into Children's Services within Cyngor Gwynedd. The appendix complements the Voice of the Child Strategy by setting out the link between direct work with children, case records, professional supervision, quality assurance activities, service user feedback and service improvement arrangements.

Policy Statement

Children's Services operate on the basis that the voice of the child is an essential element of effective professional practice, safeguarding and high quality decision-making. The voice of the child is not an additional activity or a separate compliance requirement; it is an integral part of the assessment, planning, implementation, review, supervision and improvement of services.

- All children will have a real opportunity to express their views, feelings, wishes and experiences in a way that is appropriate to their age, development, language, ability and communication needs.
- The child's views will be actively sought and clearly recorded, including how the information was collected, what the child said or demonstrated, and how these were used in decision-making.
- The voice of the child will be considered alongside professional judgement, risk evidence, safeguarding responsibilities and the wider context of the child's well-being.
- Where it is not possible to act on a child's wish or choice, the reasons will be recorded and, where appropriate, explained to the child in an honest, sensitive and age-appropriate way.
- Managers will use supervision, case audits and quality assurance activities to ensure that the voice of the child is visible, sufficient and influences planning and decisions.

Operating principles

Rights-based approach

Children are rights holders. Their right to be heard applies to individual decisions about their lives and to wider decisions about services.

Purposeful listening

There should be a clear purpose to every conversation, observation or engagement activity, and the child should understand, as far as possible, how their voice can have influence.

Inclusion

Methods of communication will be adapted to the child, not the child to the process. This includes pre-verbal children, non-verbal children, disabled children, children with additional learning needs, children who have experienced trauma and children who are less confident when talking to adults.

Emotional safety

The need for children to repeat their story should be reduced. Practitioners will plan how to listen in a way that reduces stress and respects trusting relationships.

Transparency and feedback

Listening involves a duty to explain what happens next. Children will receive appropriate feedback on how their opinion was used or why it could not be acted upon.

Accountability

Evidence of the voice of the child will be included in records, plans, decisions, reviews and quality assurance activities.

How does the voice of the child feed into Children's Services arrangements?

The following flow chart shows how the voice of the child moves from the child's individual experience to case practice, supervision, quality assurance and service improvement:

The source of the voice of the child	How it is gathered	How it feeds into decisions	Evidence of quality assurance
Direct work with the child	Individual conversations; observations; communication equipment; playwork or creative activities; methods adapted to age, language and development.	Informs an understanding of lived experience, wishes, feelings, risks, strengths and what is important to the child.	Clear case records; specific references to the voice of the child in assessments, plans and supervision notes.
Well-being and risk assessments	Seek the child's views as part of the assessment; consider what the child is saying, showing or conveying through behaviour.	Shapes risk analysis, needs, strengths, personal outcomes and next steps.	Case examinations test whether the assessment reflects the child's experience and not solely the views of adults.
Safeguarding investigations and allegations against a person in a position of trust	Ensure that a child is heard in a safe, sensitive and proportionate way, without causing further harm.	Informs decisions about safety, protection arrangements, risk management and multi-agency work.	Management oversight, strategy discussions, decision records and sampling of safeguarding cases.
Care and support plans	Discuss what's important to the child, what is working, any	Influences the plan's objectives, interventions, contact arrangements,	Plan reviews; progress records; evidence that actions are related to the child's wishes and well-being.

	worries, and what would help.	placements, support and measures of success.	
Meetings and statutory reviews	Involve the child directly where appropriate; use advocacy, statements, representation or other means when attendance is not appropriate.	Ensures that the meeting takes into account the child's experience and wishes when deciding on plans and steps to be taken.	Minutes of meetings showing how the child's views were presented, considered and incorporated.
Advocacy and alternative means of communication	Referral or offer independent advocacy; use visual resources, symbols, communication through a trusted person or specialised methods.	Reduces the risk of the voice of the child being filtered through adults or lost due to communication barriers.	A record of advocacy proposals, decision rationale and evidence that communication needs have been considered.
Complaints, praise and feedback	Gather direct feedback from children and young people about their experience of the service.	Identify strengths, barriers, lived experience themes and areas for improvement.	Analyse themes from feedback; improvement steps; reporting to teams, managers, and relevant governance arrangements.
Wider participation activities	Forums, discussion groups, surveys, participation events and links to the corporate voice of the child work-stream.	Feeds children's experiences into service planning, commissioning, policy, improvement priorities and impact evaluation.	Participation reports; examples of "You Said – We Did"; service action plans.

1. Assessment

When assessing a child's or family's needs, the assessment must include clear evidence of the child's lived experience. The assessment should distinguish between the child's opinions, the views of parents or carers, practitioners' observations and professional analysis. The record should show how the voice of the child was sought, and what the impact was on the analysis.

2. Planning

Care and support plans, safeguarding plans, looked-after child plans and transition plans should show a clear link between what is important to the child and the agreed actions. Where the child's wishes differ from what is considered safe or appropriate, the plan should record the rationale and the way in which this will be explained.

3. Action and intervention

Interventions should respond to what the child is saying or demonstrating about his or her life. This includes considering important relationships, placement, contact arrangements, school experience, emotional health, identity, culture and language.

4. Review

Reviews should test whether the plan makes a difference from the child's point of view. They should not rely solely on process measures. The central question should be: what has changed for the child, and how do we know that; from the child themselves or through other relevant evidence?

5. Close or step down

Before closing a case or stepping down to other services, consideration should be given to whether the child has had the opportunity to express an opinion about the change, whether the outcomes that were important to them have been achieved, and whether ongoing arrangements are clear and secure.

Information, feedback and right to rectification

The child, in a way appropriate to their age and communication needs, will be informed who is making the decision, what will happen next and when an update will be available.

When a decision or change is pending, appropriate updates will be given during the process and not just at the end. A record will show what feedback was given to the child, how it was given and whether the child understood the next step.

The child will have an opportunity, where appropriate, to correct or challenge an incorrect summary of his or her point of view. The distinction between the child's words, adult interpretation and professional opinion will remain clear.

Measuring first-hand experience

Quality assurance will include asking whether the child felt he or she was heard, whether he or she understood what happened next, and whether he or she can see how his or her views were considered.

From individual experience to service improvement

Anonymous themes of casework, feedback, complaints, praise and advocacy will be shared with Llais Ni: Services and the relevant governance arrangements to inform the improvement of services, without disclosing personal information.

Role of supervision and quality assurance

The voice of the child is part of professional accountability at all levels. Practitioners are responsible for seeking, recording and using the voice of the child. Managers are responsible for ensuring that this happens consistently and is of a high quality. Quality assurance activities provide evidence and challenge about how visible and effective the voice of the child is in practice.

- Individual supervision: discussing what the child has said or shown, how this has informed analysis and what next steps are needed.
- Management and decision supervision: ensuring that key decisions set out how the voice of the child was taken into account.
- Case checks and sampling: checking the quality of records, assessments, plans and reviews from the perspective of the voice of the child.
- Practice evaluations and team diagnostics: identify themes across teams and services, including strengths and gaps in practice.
- Service user feedback: using the experiences of children, young people and families to inform service improvement.
- Multi-agency learning: use learning from reviews, inspections, safeguarding discussions and partner feedback to strengthen practice.

What should we see in effective practice?

- Case records include the child's direct voice where possible, and explain methods of communication when the child is not expressing an opinion verbally.
- Assessments include an analysis of the child's lived experience, not just a description of the adults' circumstances.

- Plans show a link between the child's wishes, feelings and needs and the agreed actions.
- Decisions show how the child's opinions were given due weight, taking into account age, understanding, maturity, safety and well-being.
- Children receive appropriate feedback about the outcome of their contribution, including when a specific change or choice is not possible.
- Managers challenge cases where the voice of the child is not visible or where it is primarily represented through an adult perspective.
- Themes of feedback, complaints, praise and audits are used to improve practice and provision.
- There is evidence that children at risk of under-representation have been given suitable means to enable participation.

Measuring impact

In order to demonstrate that the voice of the child is having a real impact, the service should be able to show evidence at three levels:

Level	Question of assurance	Examples of evidence
Individual child	Has the child been heard and has their voice influenced decisions about their life?	Direct work records; assessments; plans; reviews; minutes of decisions; feedback to the child.
Team or service	Is there consistent practice across employees, teams, and services?	Sample checks; supervision; team diagnostics; themes of feedback; team improvement plans.
Strategic	Do children's experiences influence policy, commissioning, service planning and improvement priorities?	Quality assurance reports; complaint/praise analysis; themes of participation; performance reports; examples of "You said – We did".

Key questions for case investigation

- Does the record show that the child has been seen or heard directly? If not, is there a clear reason?
- Has the child's method of communication been properly considered and adjusted?
- Does the record distinguish between the child's words, an adult's interpretation and professional opinion?
- Does the assessment describe the child's lived experience and the impact of family circumstances on them?
- Do key decisions indicate how the child's views were taken into account?
- Is there evidence that the child has received feedback on what will happen next?
- Is there evidence of advocacy or communication support when that was appropriate?
- Does the plan include actions that respond to what is important to the child?
- Has supervision addressed the voice of the child and challenged any gaps?
- Is there evidence that learning from the case feeds into wider improvement where applicable?

Roles and responsibilities

Role	Responsibility in relation to the voice of the child
Practitioners	Seek, understand, record and use the voice of the child in direct work, assessments, plans, meetings and reviews.
Team Managers	Ensure that the voice of the child is visible in supervision, records and decisions; challenge gaps; support practice development.
Service Managers	Identify themes across teams; using data, audits and feedback to inform staff improvement and development.
Senior Leaders	Ensure that the voice of children is involved in governance, strategic planning, commissioning, risk management and improvement priorities.
Multi-agency partners	Share relevant information about the child's experience, contribute to coherent decisions and ensure that multi-agency plans reflect the voice of the child.
Children and young people	Have safe, appropriate and meaningful opportunities to share their experiences and see how their contribution has been considered.

Summary

This appendix confirms that the voice of the child is a core part of Children's Services arrangements in Gwynedd. It links direct work with children to the recording, assessment, planning, supervision, audit and improvement of services. The proof of success is that it is possible to demonstrate how the voice of the child was understood, respected, considered and used to improve decisions and outcomes for children.

