

THE VOICE OF THE CHILD STRATEGY



Cyngor
Gwynedd

The Gwynedd Children and Young People's Voice Forums

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THE GWYNEDD CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S VOICE FORUMS

Purpose of the Appendix

The purpose of this appendix is to show how the voice of Gwynedd children and young people forums act as part of Cyngor Gwynedd's corporate arrangements to ensure that children and young people can meaningfully influence decisions, services and priorities that impact their lives.

The appendix reiterates the Voice of the Child Strategy by setting out the way that the views, experiences and priorities of children and young people are gathered, discussed, represented, transferred to those who make decisions and lead to implementation and feedback.

The purpose of the forums is not to solely conduct one-off consultations. Their purpose is to create an ongoing, inclusive and accountable system where children and young people have a safe place to voice their opinion, a relevant audience to listen to them and a clear path for their views to influence change.

Policy Statement

Cyngor Gwynedd will conduct and develop children and young people forums as an integral part of its participation arrangements, governance and service improvement.

The forums will act on the basis that children and young people are rights holders, and that appropriate emphasis must be placed on their views in decisions that affect them.

The arrangements will ensure that the voice of children and young people is gathered in a meaningful way, is fairly represented, and is submitted to the right people, and leads to implementation, feedback or a clear explanation as to why change is not possible.

The Council will ensure that the forums:

- provide regular opportunities for children and young people to voice their opinion on matters that are important to them;
- include a varied range of children and young people from different areas, backgrounds, services and experiences;
- connect local, regional and county structures in a clear way;
- enable children and young people to raise their own matters, as well as respond to questions from Council services;
- ensure that the views of children and young people are shared with officers, elected members, management teams and relevant committees;
- lead to clear implementation plans, where appropriate;
- give feedback to children and young people on what is happening as a result of their contribution.

Operating principles

Meaningful participation

Participation in the forums will be more than an opportunity to voice an opinion. It will involve listening, discussing, agreeing on priorities, implementing and reviewing impact. Children and young people should be able to see how their views are used or understand why it was not possible to act on them.

Inclusion

The arrangements will try to include children and young people from every part of Gwynedd, including those who do not always engage through formal structures. Various methods will be used, including face-to-face discussions, surveys, questionnaires, digital opportunities, local groups and regional forums.

From a local to a strategic level

The matters will be able to move from a local level to a regional level, and then to a county level. This will ensure that the experiences of children and young people in schools, youth clubs, community services and specialist services are able to influence service planning and strategic decisions.

Transparency and feedback

The Council will be clear with children and young people regarding the purpose of each participation activity, who will listen, what could change and what cannot be changed. Feedback will be an integral part of the process.

Accountability

There will be a clear responsibility on services, managers and the relevant executive board to consider the matters raised by children and young people, respond to them and record any actions taken or reasons for no implementation.

How does the structure work?

The arrangements of the Gwynedd children and young people forums are based on a clear flow from the local level to the county level.

1. Local level

On a local level, children and young people can share their views through schools, school councils, youth clubs, community groups, specific services, partner projects or direct contact with professionals.

- discussions in schools or learner groups;
- local youth groups;
- specific groups such as well-being groups, LGBTQ+ groups, community groups or service groups;
- reviews or questionnaires on a specific subject;
- informal discussions with workers with whom young people have a trusting relationship;
- digital or anonymous methods for young people who do not wish to speak in meetings.

This level is important because this is where the lived experiences of children and young people are heard close to their communities, their schools and their services.

2. Regional level

Regional forums will bring representatives from different local groups together across the three areas in Gwynedd.

- Arfon;
- Dwyfor;
- Meirionnydd.

The purpose of the regional forums is to share matters that arise locally, identify common themes, discuss area priorities and agree which matters should move forward to a county level.

These forums could include representatives from schools, the Youth Service, social services, third-sector partners, community groups and other services that work with children and young people.

3. County level

The Gwynedd Youth Forum will act as the main county mechanism to bring the voices of children and young people together.

- Llais Ni: Schools;
- Llais Ni: Youth Service;
- Llais Ni: Services.

The three streams will ensure that the voices of children and young people can be gathered from a range of experiences: school experience, youth and community experience and experience of specific services.

The purpose of the Gwynedd Youth Forum will be to do the following:

- discuss matters that are raised by children and young people;
- identify county priorities;
- introduce the perspectives of children and young people to the Council;
- agree on implementation steps with the relevant services;
- receive feedback on progress;
- ensure that children and young people are able to see the impact of their contribution.

The connection with decision-making

The forums will connect to the Council's decision-making arrangements through several routes.

Matters that are raised by children and young people could be presented to:

- departmental management teams;
- relevant services;
- action groups;
- Cabinet Members;
- elected members;
- relevant committees;
- governance or scrutiny procedures when appropriate.

The Council's services will also be able to introduce matters to the forums to ask for the views of children and young people before developing a policy, reviewing a service or making a relevant decision.

This creates a two-way flow:

From the children and young people to the Council	From the Council to children and young people
Children and young people raise matters that are important to them.	Services ask for opinions on a policy, plan or service.
Local and regional forums identify themes.	Information is shared in an accessible way.
County Forum agrees on priorities.	Children and young people have an opportunity to challenge, question and contribute.
Matters are transferred to services or members.	Feedback is given on what has changed or why change is not possible.

The implementation cycle

The work of the forums will follow a clear implementation cycle:

1. Listening

Children and young people have opportunities to share their opinion, experiences, concerns and ideas through methods that are suitable for them.

2. Gathering and understanding

The information is gathered, analysed and discussed to identify themes, priorities and matters that require a response.

3. Discussing and agreeing

Children and young people, professionals, partners and the Council discuss the findings and agree on implementation steps where appropriate.

4. Action together

Services, departments or partners take steps to respond to the matters raised. This could include changing arrangements, adapting a service, developing resources, raising awareness or commissioning further work.

5. Feedback

Children and young people are informed of what has happened as a result of their contribution. Where change is not possible, clear and honest reasons will be provided.

6. Review

The forums return to the matters raised to check whether the actions have made a difference, and whether further work is required.

How do the forums make a difference?

The forums will make a difference when it is possible to show that the views of children and young people have influenced thinking, decisions or actions.

This may include:

- changing a policy or procedure;
- adapting the way that a service is provided;
- identifying obstacles to children and young people;
- improving communication between the Council and young people;
- developing training opportunities or information for young people;
- raising local matters to strategic attention;
- improving the Council's understanding of the lived experiences of children and young people;
- strengthening confidence, skills and the young people's sense of belonging and influence.

Impact does not always mean that a request from children and young people leads to a direct change. Sometimes, the impact will be that a decision is made based on improving the understanding of young people's experience, or that reasons for not changing are explained in clearer terms.

What should we see in effective arrangements?

When the forums work effectively, there should be evidence that:

- children and young people understand the purpose of the forum and how their views could influence;
- there is representation from different areas, services, backgrounds and experiences;
- matters are raised by children and young people themselves, not solely adults;
- the opinion of young people is clearly recorded and summarised without losing the meaning of their message;
- actions are agreed with responsibilities and timetables;
- the Council's services respond to the matters raised;
- elected members and managers listen firsthand to children and young people where appropriate;
- feedback is given to young people on the impact of their contribution;
- themes from the forums inform service planning, improvement priorities and relevant reports.

Measuring impact

To show that the forums are making a difference, evidence must be gathered on three levels:

Level	Question of assurance	Examples of evidence
Child or young person	Has the child or young person had a meaningful opportunity to voice their opinion and understand what happened afterwards?	Participation records; feedback from young people; attendance in forums; examples of individual or group feedback.
Forum or region	Has the forum identified themes, priorities and clear implementation steps?	Meeting minutes; action plans; regional themes; "You Said - We Did" records.
Strategic	Have the voices of children and young people influenced policy, service planning or Council decisions?	Reports to management teams or committees; changes to policy or provisions; decision records; updates to the Gwynedd Youth Forum.

Roles and responsibilities

Role	Responsibility
Children and young people	Share views, experiences and ideas; represent wider perspectives where appropriate; contribute to priorities and actions.
Forum representatives	Gather views from peers, contribute to local, regional and county discussions, and help to share feedback.
Youth workers, schools and service workers	Support children and young people to participate, remove obstacles, promote hot topics and ensure that the voice of young people is recorded and shared.
The forum co-ordinator	Facilitate the arrangements, support meetings, coordinate information, monitor progress and ensure that feedback is shared.
Service managers and team leaders	Respond to the matters raised, share information within their services, agree on actions and ensure progress.
Executive board or governing group	Oversee the arrangements, ensure that actions are monitored and strengthen corporate accountability.
Elected members	Listen to the voices of children and young people, provide a democratic challenge and ensure that their views are considered in relevant decisions.
Partners	Support the participation of children and young people from different communities and services, share relevant information to guide improvement.

The operational model of the Forum and the Young People's Cabinet

Membership and representation

The arrangements to select members will be open, accessible and will be explained to the young people. There will be representation from Arfon, Dwyfor and Meirionnydd, schools, the Youth Service, service users and young people who do not engage via formal structures. Additional methods will gather the views of people who are not forum members.

Sharing the responsibilities

Roles such as the chair, deputy-chair and secretary will be shared or delegated. Members in reserve or joint representatives will be able to support the principal representative to reduce pressure and ensure continuation.

Meetings and an agenda

The Forum and the Young People's Cabinet will meet regularly throughout the year. There will be a simple mechanism for young people to present agenda items, and a part of each agenda will be set by the young people themselves.

Operational register and feedback

An accessible operational register will note the matter, the owner, the next step, the timeframe, the status and the feedback given. Updates will be provided even when there is no final decision.

The relationship with the Young People's Cabinet

The Gwynedd Youth Forum will specify the county priorities. The Young People's Cabinet, as an operational group within the Forum, will present these priorities to the decision makers, requesting updates and will report back to the Forum.

Summary

The Gwynedd children and young people's voice forums provide a clear structure to move the voice of children from a local experience to a strategic influence. They connect schools, youth services, Council services, partners, managers and elected members in an arrangement that allows children and young people to raise matters, discuss priorities, influence actions and receive feedback.

The proof of success is that the voice of children and young people does not remain in meetings or minutes, but that it leads to a better understanding, better decisions, more relevant services and a stronger sense among children and young people that their views are heard, respected and implemented.



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