

# VoCalderdale

Calderdale Children and Young People's Voice  
and Influence Strategy

"My voice  
matters"



**What children and young people in Calderdale have told us they want a say on:**



## Foreword/Thanks

This strategy was co-created with and led by children and young people from all of Calderdale's Youth Voice groups. A huge thank you, for all your help on the strategy, to the children and young people from:

- Youth Council
- SEND Youth Representatives
- Gateway
- Express
- Young Commissioners
- Young Advisors
- Care Leavers' Collective

Thank you to the children and young people from:

- Ovenden Seniors Youth Group at Forest Cottage
- Elland Senior Youth Group at Elland Hub

### A word from our Director of Children and Young People's Services:

At every stage of a young person's journey in Calderdale, we strive to really listen, understand, and act on what our children and young people are telling us. Through this work we can build on family strengths and help our children to lead a 'larger life'. Our young people told us they want to have hope and aspiration for the future when they reach the age of 15. It's important that we continue to involve them in improving our services and spend time gathering their thoughts and feelings, using new and innovative ways of capturing their voice. Effective communication is key, so I hope you enjoy reading this co-produced strategy and think about how this can improve your practice.

### A word from our Member of Youth Parliament, Maryam:

I would define Youth Voice as something as simple as young people having input on and influencing what is happening around them. It's so imperative that we do have a say and are actually listened to, so it's really great that we have been able to help form a strategy for a matter that truly does impact us and we have been included from the start.

Youth council, and other voice groups, are here to make sure all young people are represented, ensuring anyone's views can come to light.

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# Section 1:

## *About this strategy*

### What is a Voice and Influence Strategy?

Calderdale's Voice and Influence Strategy is a plan that ensures children and young people can share their ideas and have a say in decisions that affect them. It is a plan of actions that helps us reach a goal or make something better. It's like a roadmap showing us what steps to take to make sure we achieve what we set out to do.

It helps make sure their voices are heard and that they can be part of making changes in their communities or schools. For example, the Council supports groups like the Youth Council, where young people can discuss issues important to them and influence local services. To make sure we provide the right services for children and young people, we need to listen to their views and understand their needs. We'll use what they tell us to make positive changes, working closely with our partners.

We're committed to a '**doing with us, not to us**' approach. This means giving all young people a chance to get involved in shaping services. We aim to make it easy and enjoyable for everyone to take part, with safe spaces where they can share ideas, participate in activities, and enjoy opportunities like residential.

### Dictionary:

- **Child-led Practices:** Approaches where children take the lead in decisions, with adults providing support and guidance as needed.
- **Co production or collaborative practices:** Children, young people, and adults work together equally to design and deliver services or projects.
- **Consultative practices:** Children and young people are asked for their views to help shape decisions, though adults may have final say.
- **Systemic practice:** Systemic practice involves looking at how different parts of a system interact with each other. In health and social care, this means considering how the needs of individuals, families, and communities are interconnected.
- The term '**children**' is used in this document to refer to anyone under the age of 18. While we acknowledge this may not be the language young people use to describe themselves, it serves as a reminder to professionals of their legal status and our statutory (legal) responsibilities towards them.





## What does the law say?

These legal and policy frameworks underline the importance of involving children and young people in decisions affecting their lives, ensuring their voices are heard and acted upon:

- **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 12)**  
Every child has the right to freely express their views on matters affecting them.
- **Children Act 1989**  
Establishes the legal duty to prioritise children's wishes and feelings, particularly for children in care. This includes both individual case decisions and service design.
- **Children Act 2004**  
Requires local authorities to consider children's wishes in child protection decisions and provide independent support to help them express their views.
- **Children and Families Act 2014 (Section 19)**  
Involves children, young people, and families in decision-making at all levels, including service commissioning, SEND local offers, and Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs). It also gives young people aged 16+ the right to influence decisions about their EHCPs.
- **Director and Lead Member Roles (Statutory Guidance, 2014)**  
Local authorities must ensure children and young people are involved in planning, commissioning, and delivering services, promoting their participation in decision-making.
- **Children and Social Work Act 2017**  
Introduces corporate parenting principles for looked-after children and care leavers, including a duty to consult on and publish a local offer. Two principles focus on amplifying the voice of the child.
- **Working Together (2023)**  
Stresses the importance of listening to children in safeguarding, with their feedback guiding practitioner behaviour.
- **Children's Social Care National Framework (2023)**  
Places children's voices at the centre of social care practice, requiring leaders to embed feedback in service design and ensure complaints are acted on. Practitioners must amplify children's views to shape services.
- **Ofsted**  
Ofsted includes the voice of the child as a core focus in its inspection framework for local authorities.



# Introduction

## Purpose and aims

The purpose of this strategy is to empower children and young people, ensuring we allow them to share their opinions and priorities to influence decision making in Calderdale. Calderdale Council and its partners have previously involved young people in a range of decisions, consultations, and processes: this new strategy enables us to plan for the future, and to renew a commitment to hearing the voice of children and young people.

Outside school, there need to be opportunities for young people to be involved in activities that they enjoy and that open choices for them to reach their potential and allow them to play their part in shaping our future. We also need to make it more achievable for all young people to get their foot on the jobs ladder with good quality jobs providing regular income. We believe providing opportunities for engaging young people to share their voice plays an important role in achieving this.



### Our ambitions for all children and young people:

- Start healthy and stay healthy.
- Are safe at home, in school and the community.
- Enjoy learning and achieve their best.
- Stay in education and get a job.
- Develop social skills, take part in activities and have a voice in decisions that affect them.
- Develop or maintain positive relationships with their family, friends, and other trusted professionals, while upholding their rights.
- All 15-year-olds to have hope and aspiration.
- Make the most of leisure opportunities, hobbies, and interests.

### Our goals:

- To make sure that young people's voices are listened and responded to, tackling issues that affect their lives.
- To influence decision making, improve services and strengthen participation for young people in Calderdale.
- To develop new skills and build confidence.
- To make sure our voice empowers others.

### How we work is underpinned by the West Yorkshire Combined Authority Child-First Framework:

- Recognise children as equal stakeholders.
- Prioritise meaningful engagement with children to influence our work.
- Evidence our understanding.



# Calderdale **VISION** 34

In 2034, Calderdale will be an enterprising place, full of opportunity, where we can all live a larger life. We will always be kind and welcoming. Everyone will have reason to be full of hope and this will enable us to thrive and get us through testing times. We will be celebrated for our distinctive heritage, nature and creativity that everyone can enjoy.

In creating the Vision 2034, stories were gathered which underpin the key themes. What connected people's stories was a strong sense of community and volunteer spirit, and a proactive, 'can do' attitude. People in Calderdale believe they can change things for the better, and do not stand by to let things happen or 'take things lying down'. People referenced caring for others with dignity and a community sense of responsibility. There were stories about reaching out to marginalised people and those who have sought refuge in the area. There was also evidence of people quickly getting involved and contributing to cultural life and community care, strengthening the diversity of skills and participation. Calderdale is somewhere welcoming where good things are possible through a strong sense of collective identity and effort.

**This shows the clear desire to be part of their communities, contributing and getting their voices heard to make change.**

Young people have told us that they want to make a difference and be part of making positive change in their communities, and so we want to prioritise meaningful collaboration with children and young people across Calderdale on topics that matter most to them.



# Section 2:

## *Our Participation Principles*

Children and young people from across Calderdale's Youth Voice groups came up with the following 'Rules of Engagement' when adults are working with them. We expect all who consult, engage and work with our voice groups to follow these rules:

- Respect our views and experiences.
- Acknowledge and use our views and experiences when developing policy.
- Listen to the points we raise.
- Feedback to us on sessions.
- Do not cancel our opportunities.
- Do not sit talking at us, include us in the conversation.
- Make sessions interactive and respect our leisure time.
- Make sessions inclusive for all.
- Create safe spaces for us to open up.

Please refer to the appendices for the form for partners and practitioners to sign before engaging with children and young people to capture their voice and influence.



### **Systemic practice**

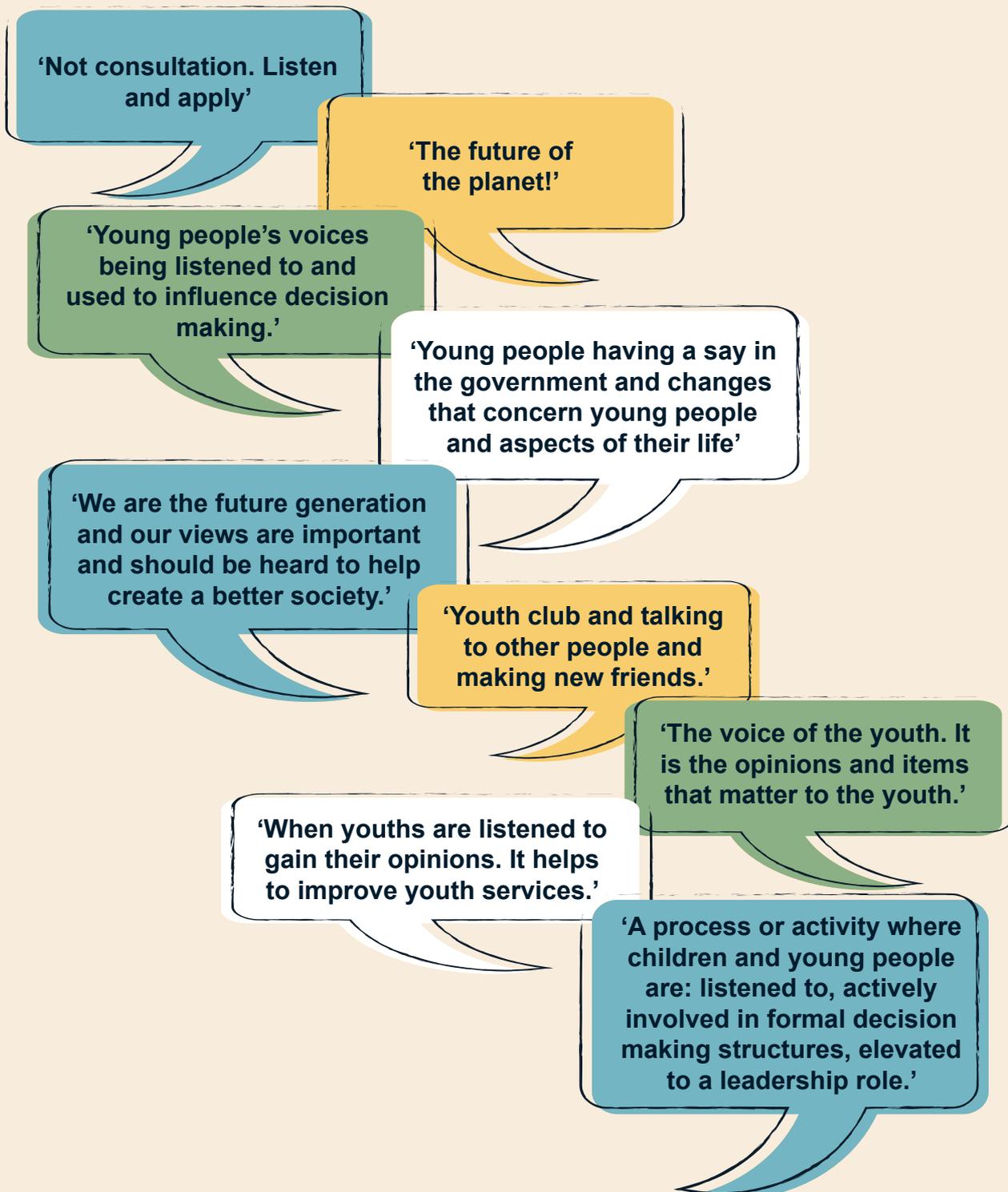
Children and young people are always central to what we do. Their safety and quality of life are at the heart of the decisions we make and we treat children, young people and families as experts in their own lives.

- We listen and respond to what they say, and also what adults who know them say.
- We explain what we are doing and why.
- Children are our focus but we recognise that they live as part of families and communities.
- We try to put ourselves in their shoes to check that we are doing the right things.
- We take responsibility for our actions and keep to the deadlines we have agreed.
- We apologise if we fail to meet our obligations.

## What do we mean by participation?

Participation in Calderdale is about ensuring children, young people, and their families have meaningful opportunities to shape decisions that affect their lives. This includes embracing child-led practices, where young people take the lead in raising their priorities and influencing outcomes. Collaboration should be fostered, where children, families, and adults work together as equal partners. Participation goes beyond addressing issues set by adults, empowering children and young people to set their own agendas and take an active role in decision-making. By supporting their involvement, we ensure their voices are central to both personal and public decisions, creating better outcomes for everyone.

## What is youth voice according to our children and young people?



# Benefits of participation

For children, young people, and families:

- Boosts self-esteem, confidence, and self-worth.
- Empowers them to take control and influence decisions about their lives.
- Builds valuable skills like negotiation, problem-solving, and self-advocacy.
- Encourages positive contributions and long-term change.
- Promotes awareness of their rights and responsibilities as citizens.
- Provides a platform to challenge injustice, discrimination, or abuse.
- Strengthens their ability to hold services accountable and aspire to their potential.

For staff:

- Provides valuable insights to meet needs creatively.
- Shifts perceptions about adults, professionals, and organisations.
- Enhances shared decision-making and job satisfaction.
- Highlights the positive impact of professional support.
- Develops new skills and confidence.

For services:

- Creates innovative and responsive solutions.
- Provides fresh ideas and perspectives for service delivery.
- Improves effectiveness and outcomes by aligning services with real needs.
- Ensures transparency, fairness, and equity for those with complex needs.
- Informs relevant, sustainable, and impactful decisions.

# Why children and young people's voices matter in Calderdale

Their input helps shape how we:

- Plan, evaluate, and improve our services.
- Communicate with them effectively.
- Recruit, train, and supervise staff.
- Commission services on their behalf.
- Develop long-term strategies and allocate resources.



# Why their voices matter, according to our children and young people:

We're the future, a different perspective, a powerful voice.

The new generation is always smarter and always evolving. They might have solutions to problems early on. **With enough support, they can change the world.**

**'For the next person after me'**...I have my own struggles but also I share struggles with others. Some people are unable to have a voice and I like to speak for them ... I want to improve things for them but also the next person... My say matters because I want it **to I am determined to be heard.**

I live in this Local Authority, and this should be listened to. My understanding and opinions and expertise is valuable to the community.

My life and experiences and difference in age, race and lived experiences make our voices matter.

It's a doorway, an opportunity.

Future generations' views are important. They should be heard to help create a better society. Making changes for the better and help influence decisions.

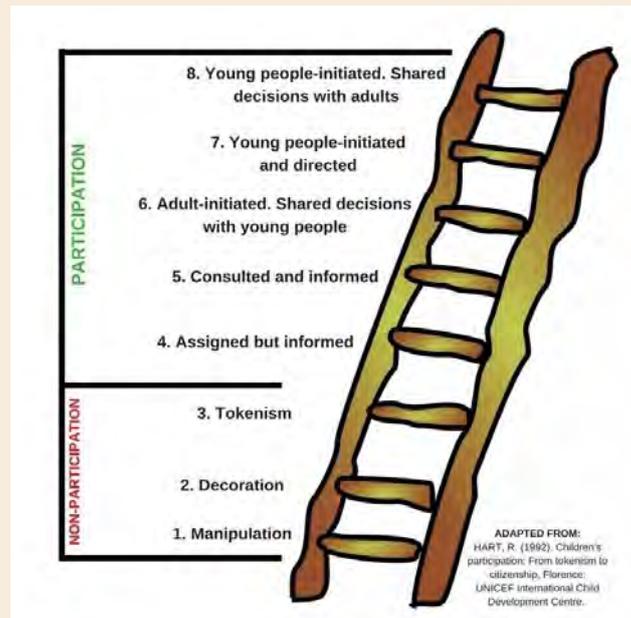
We are the people who are on the streets playing out and in the communities. We should have a say on what goes

Because I like to be heard.

It brings communities together.

Only you can tell your own story.

# Our model



Roger Hart's higher levels of participation emphasise meaningful involvement, where children and young people are actively engaged in decisions that affect their lives. These levels include collaboration, where young people work as equals with adults, and child-led participation, where young people take the lead with adult support. Hart's model encourages moving beyond tokenism to ensure that their voices are genuinely heard and valued.

In Calderdale we use these principles to empower young people to influence decisions and shape services. This approach ensures their views are at the heart of our work, fostering trust, confidence, and positive outcomes for the community.

## Our communication framework

→ *Effective communication is everyone's responsibility.*

Children and young people express themselves in various ways and may have various barriers to participation. Practitioners should adapt their approach to ensure that voices are heard, avoiding the exclusion of children who might otherwise take part. In Calderdale, we should:

- Think about the most effective way to communicate with a child, considering their disability, age, developmental stage, and language. Effective communication is everyone's responsibility.
- Consider whether any specialist communication support is necessary for children with disabilities and/or complex communication needs. At times, this may require collaboration with other agencies.
- If the child speaks a different language, is non-verbal, or pre-verbal, explore alternative ways to communicate with them.
- Support them in the best way to express their feelings and wishes.
- Consider whether further training enhance your understanding of the child's experiences and help build a stronger relationship with them.

## Voice of the child in Early Years

Communicating with and listening to babies and young children is essential for their overall development. From birth, children show us how they feel. They use sounds, cries, gestures and facial expressions to tell us when they are hungry, tired, content, uncomfortable or happy. This early communication is key to supporting their health and wellbeing as they grow. When we pay attention to children's verbal and non-verbal cues, we learn how to meet their needs. We also begin to understand their stage of development. This helps us offer the right experiences and choices to support them as individuals. When a child's needs are met and they feel they belong, they are better able to grow and thrive. This helps them become confident and independent. It also supports their ability to express their needs, make choices and manage emotions in a way that's right for their age and stage of development.

In Calderdale, Early Years providers work closely with families to understand the voice of each child in their care. They pay close attention to the child's cues, likes and dislikes, and know what may upset them and how they are comforted. Practitioners regularly observe children and support their development. This includes speech, language and communication, physical development, and personal, social and emotional growth. Through this, practitioners begin to understand each child's voice and how their life experiences have shaped them. Information is shared regularly with families. If a child needs extra support, this is identified early and planned for. Good communication and listening to children helps them feel heard and included. When children feel they have a choice, it supports their confidence and emotional regulation. This approach helps reduce long-term impacts on development, improves educational outcomes, and contributes to their positive role in society later in life.



# Section 3:

## *Focus Areas*



### What we are doing well:

- Leaders engage directly with children and young people, attending partnership boards and staying informed about developments across the borough.
- Children and young people participate in senior leadership interview panels.
- They independently create, plan, and lead their own events and projects on topics that matter to them.
- We provide safe spaces for vulnerable individuals to share their voices.
- Surveys, such as those by Young Advisors, gather views from over 900 children and young people in Calderdale to shape our projects.
- SEND Youth Representatives share their perspectives with partners and Council departments, influencing areas like public health, education, and organisational development, and regularly attend the Strategic Partnership for SEND board meetings.
- Attendance and volunteer numbers at Gateway continue to grow since restarting post-lockdown.
- Youth Council members represent Calderdale's youth voice at partnership boards regionally and nationally.
- Express and the Care Leavers' Collective actively contribute, and effect change as corporate parents through the Corporate Parenting Partnership Board.
- We collaborate with children and young people to develop resources used by schools and services.
- They co-produce and collaborate on projects locally and regionally.
- Youth groups throughout Calderdale are child-led, and base activities both on their wishes and hot topics which emerge in the community which may impact them.

# Our Priorities: How We Are Going to Be Better

## The 'Yellow Brick Road' to better participation, as named by our children and young people

### 1. Listening and engaging

How we will ensure that voices are heard and valued meaningfully:

- Engage children and young people early, valuing their input as stakeholders.
- Create safe, inclusive, and empowering opportunities for them to express their views.
- Ensure consultations, surveys, and materials are accessible and age appropriate.
- Develop training for people supporting children and young people to address barriers they face and support their social skills for adulthood.
- Plan activities at times that respect their leisure, such as before or after youth clubs.
- Raise awareness of voice and participation opportunities in Calderdale through improved social media and online presence.
- Support staff to gain the skills and confidence to involve them in decision-making.

### 2. Collaborating and co-designing

How we will work together to create services that meet their needs:

- Build partnerships with children and young people, treating them as active partners.
- Encourage co-design and co-production of policies, services, and events to reflect their needs and aspirations.
- Use their feedback to shape and improve service delivery.
- Ensure they have a seat at the table in conversations with decision-makers.
- Tailor approaches to reflect their demographics, avoiding a 'one size fits all' method.
- Partner with organisations that support them and share learning through local forums.
- Encourage collaboration between voice groups on overlapping issues.

### **3. Responding and acting**

How we will act on their input and ensure accountability:

- Provide timely, meaningful responses to their feedback.
- Clearly communicate how their input informs decisions, providing updates and demonstrating accountability.
- Ensure partners adhere to the same feedback standards as the Council.
- Share feedback and follow-ups with wider cohorts.
- Recognise and celebrate their contributions and achievements.
- Use clear, accessible, and child-friendly language in public-facing documents.

### **4. Learning and reinforcing**

How we will embed a culture of participation and learning:

- Consistently acknowledge the importance of their voices.
- Demonstrate how their input has made a difference through feedback loops and celebrate their involvement.
- Review the impact of our work with services and share findings with them.
- Continuously improve and develop methods to enhance their participation.
- Ensure that all staff planning for and working with children and young people supports active involvement.

### **5. Focusing on marginalised voices**

How we will ensure inclusivity and representation:

- Recruit a diverse range of participants for voice and participation activities.
- Prioritise outreach to underrepresented groups, including SEND, LGBTQIA+, care leavers, and global majority communities.
- Develop initiatives to amplify these groups' voices in decision-making.
- Train staff to engage effectively with marginalised, diverse groups and those with communication needs. Consider the development of a communication strategy.

# According to our children and young people...



## What we are doing well

- Building skills.
- We listen to everyone actively.
- Great for our CVs and to speak to colleges about.
- We take on advice.
- We get to help and make a difference.
- I enjoy activities at residential.
- Opportunities to speak to professionals, senior leaders and elected members.
- We engage in Children and Young People's Scrutiny.
- Lots of young people's voices reach people in power.
- We do what we have planned.
- We represent young people.
- We represent Calderdale in Yorkshire and the Humber and beyond.
- We welcome young people.
- We create a safe and welcoming environment.
- We work on issues that affect young people.
- We get things done.



## What could be better

- Improve our website and other social media channels.
- Do not just consult us, engage with us. We often don't hear back from those who consult us.
- Be in more locations so young people can access us easily.
- Have more partnerships with other organisations who support children and young people.
- Better engagement with schools.
- More links between our groups.
- Recruit new members and increase our profile across Calderdale to gather a range of opinions.
- Opportunities for all groups to sit on boards and meet senior staff, councillors, and MPs.



# How will we know we are doing better?

## **Feedback from young people**

Increased satisfaction in surveys and focus groups, positive input through partnership boards.

## **Tangible actions**

Clear evidence of their input leading to changes in policies, services, or events.

## **Staff development**

More staff attending training, gaining confidence, and adopting inclusive practices.

## **Diversity and participation metrics**

Broader diversity in participants and increased access to participation opportunities.

## **Organisational culture**

Leadership embedding youth collaboration in decision-making, with consistent feedback loops.

## **Digital engagement**

Increased activity and positive feedback on the Council website and social media.

## **Celebrating success**

Highlighting achievements and success stories through newsletters, forums, websites, and events.

## **Child-led practices**

Practitioners and volunteers engaging directly with young people to incorporate their voices.

## **“You said, we did”**

Providing clear feedback on actions taken following consultations and engagement.

# Section 4:

## Appendices

### 1. Links to related documents

- Health and Wellbeing Strategy: <https://new.calderdale.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2023-07/Health-and-wellbeing-strategy-2022-2027.pdf>
- Starting Well Strategy: <https://new.calderdale.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-01/Starting-Well-Strategy-2023.pdf>
- Calderdale Council Corporate Plan: <https://new.calderdale.gov.uk/council/data/priorities-and-performance/corporate-plan>
- WYCA Child First Framework: <https://www.westyorks-ca.gov.uk/media/12663/a4-child-first-framework-digital.pdf>
- Please scan below for the SEND and Care Leaver Local Offers:



## 2. Commitment to the ‘Rules of Engagement’

We, the undersigned, commit to upholding the following rules of engagement when consulting and engaging with children and young people. These rules were developed by them to ensure that their voices are valued, respected, and meaningfully included in decision-making processes.

By signing this form, we agree to:

- 1. Respect children and young people’s views and experiences**  
Treat all contributions with dignity and value their unique perspectives.
- 2. Acknowledge and use their input in policy development**  
Actively consider their views and experiences in shaping policies and decisions.
- 3. Listen to the points they raise**  
Give full attention to their voices and reflect on their input.
- 4. Provide meaningful feedback**  
Share detailed and timely updates with children and young people about how their input has influenced decisions and outcomes.
- 5. Honour commitments and avoid cancellations**  
Respect the time and effort they dedicate by keeping opportunities as scheduled.
- 6. Engage children and young people in conversations, not lectures**  
Foster two-way dialogue and collaboration rather than one-sided communication.
- 7. Make sessions interactive**  
Use engaging and participatory methods to ensure sessions are meaningful and enjoyable, especially when interrupting leisure time.
- 8. Ensure inclusivity**  
Create spaces where all children and young people, regardless of their backgrounds or abilities, can contribute equally.
- 9. Provide safe spaces for openness**  
Foster an environment of trust, confidentiality, and emotional safety.
- 10. Commit to providing feedback on outcomes**  
Clearly communicate what decisions have been made and how their contributions were used.

### **Acknowledgement**

We understand that these rules are essential for ensuring positive and productive engagement with children and young people. We pledge to adhere to them in all consultation and engagement activities.

### **Signed by:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Organisation: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

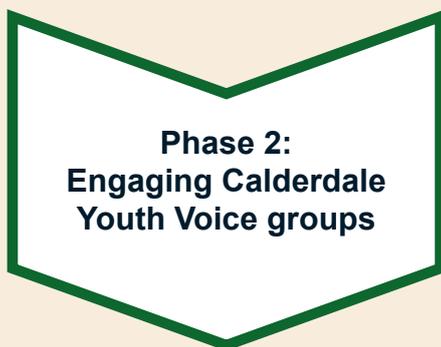
# 3. VoCalderdale: A storyboard of co-creation

## Building voice and influence into policy design

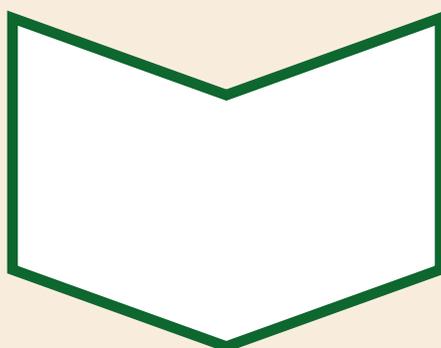
The VoCalderdale Voice and Influence Strategy is a powerful example of how public services can embed the voice and influence of children and young people into policy-making and service design. From start to finish, this strategy was co-produced with children and young people—not just for them. Their insight shaped every stage: from the name and branding, to the vision, priorities, and even how adults should engage with them. This storyboard timeline shows how a truly child-led process can lead to authentic, inclusive, and accountable strategy development.



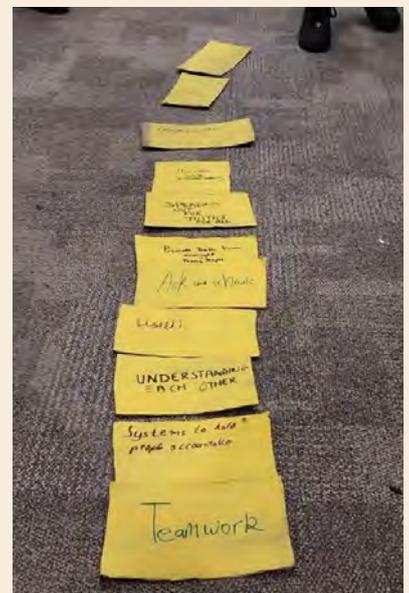
- Reviewed existing voice and engagement strategies and identified best practice: participation should be meaningful, not just tokenistic.
- Created clear aims for the child-led approach.

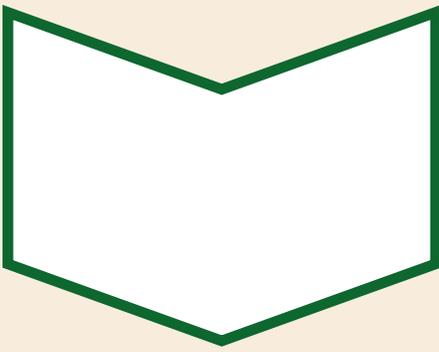


- Session 1: Exploring what matters
- Activities: group discussions, interactive rating, sculptures and artwork.
- Topics: what youth voice means, what helps or hinders feeling heard.
- Findings informed the strategies priorities.



- Session 2: Naming and visioning
- Young people created and voted on names.
- VoCalderdale chosen and “My Voice Matters” selected as tagline by all wider groups.
- Designed the ‘Yellow Brick Road’ of priorities.
- Created the first draft of the Rules of Engagement form.





- Session 3: Reviewing and designing
- Reviewed the draft strategy.
- Voted on front cover designs.
- Advised on colour choices and accessibility.
- Helped develop the Plan on a Page.



**Phase 3:  
Widening the  
conversation**

- Engagement with Calderdale youth groups
- Feedback Highlights:
- Lack of feedback from professionals after consultations.
- Language in surveys is often too complex.
- Youth club time is personal and should be respected.
- Engagement should feel human—not robotic or transactional.
- Reinforced the need for:
- Simpler language in comms.
- The Rules of Engagement form.
- System-wide accountability.



**Phase 4: What  
happens next?**

- Final feedback presented to children and young people.
- Strategy updated with their recommendations.
- Celebration Event held to recognise their contributions.
- Shared through various forums.
- Practitioners and partners encouraged to embed voice and influence in all areas of work.

## Final message

This strategy belongs to everyone whose work impacts children and young people. It is not a finished product, but a starting point for ongoing collaboration. Let's make VoCalderdale more than just a name - let's make it a way of working.

