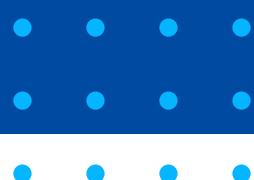




South Gloucestershire Council

YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION STRATEGY

2025-2028



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EPIC is one of the only places/groups I feel comfortable.
I feel at ease with the other young people and staff.
I enjoy coming to this group.

An EPIC Member, aged 20.



A foreword from Young People

**By Lucy (19), Alisa (17) and Jacob (16)
From the Youth Board**

Participation to us means being active, consistent and having equal voices heard across all ages and across all protected characteristics, for example gender, sexuality, race, disability, religion and being a care leaver.

South Gloucestershire is diverse and it's important to hear other people's views and help them to express their issues. You can drive for five minutes from one place to another and it's completely different!

By Skye (17) and Lara (18) From EPIC

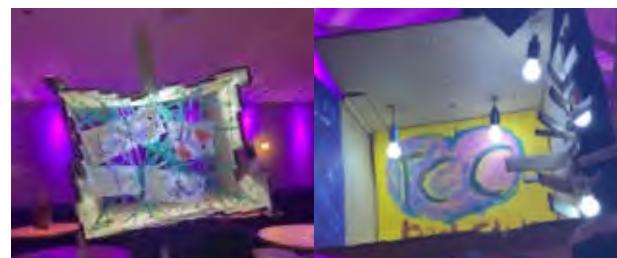
EPIC for me, is a place to have my voice heard and to make a difference to young people in the system. It also helps me get out of my flat and socialise with friends.

We worked on a project around how social workers should be less formal when spending time with a young person, for example, we said that social workers should take their lanyard off when out and about. This was then published into a learning brief and shared with all social workers.

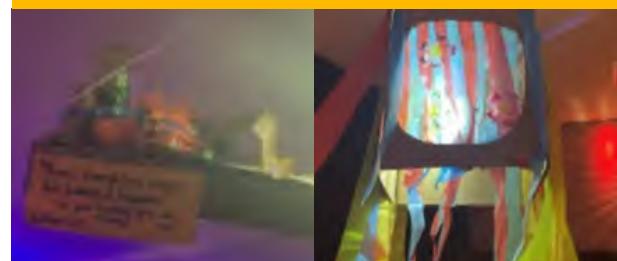
If a decision is made without the young person's say, this will cause young people some distress and may also cause some tension in the dynamics of the relationship between the young person and the social worker.

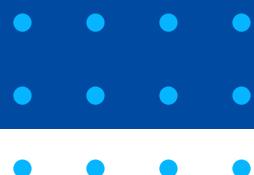
By Amirah (15) From TCC

I am not a project, I am human. I don't want you to make me feel like I'm a job, an income, a news article, a statistic, or another task on your list.



Recent sculptures made by TCC members for the 2025 CiC/CL Award Ceremony.





A foreword from **Chris Sivers**

Executive Director – People Dpt

At South Gloucestershire Council, we believe that meaningful participation is not just a duty – it is a right. When children and young people are actively involved in shaping the decisions that affect their lives, services become more effective, fairer, and more empowering.

This Participation Strategy reflects our ongoing commitment to listening, learning, and acting alongside young people – especially those with care experience, who too often face barriers to being heard. It sets out how we will continue to place their voices at the heart of what we do, not only through engagement opportunities, but by embedding participation into our culture, systems, and leadership at every level.

I am proud of the progress we've made so far, and I want to thank every young person who has contributed to this work previously and have contributed to this strategy – your insight, honesty, and creativity are key in driving us forward.

As a council, we will continue to champion your voices – through our services, our leadership, and our long-term vision for a fairer, more inclusive South Gloucestershire.

This strategy marks the next chapter in that journey.

This strategy is both a celebration of progress and a call to action: to colleagues, partners, and our communities, to listen with intent, involve with purpose, and create with integrity.

Together, we can ensure that participation is not an exception but an expectation – one that shapes a better, more inclusive future for every child and young person in South Gloucestershire.

CHRIS SIVERS
Executive Director – People
South Gloucestershire Council



A foreword from **Cllr Simon Johnson**

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

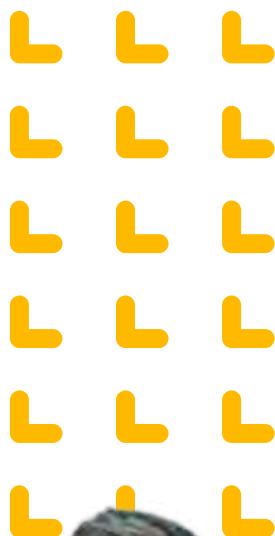
As Cabinet Member for Children and Young People in South Gloucestershire, I get to see the passion, insight, and honesty that young people bring to the table when they're given the chance to be involved. They tell us what matters to them and show us what needs to change.

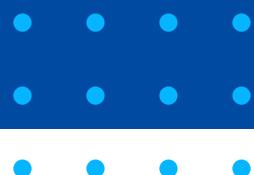
This Participation Strategy is about listening properly, acting responsibly, and making sure young people in South Gloucestershire, especially those with care experience, have a real say in the decisions that shape their lives. That means not just asking for their views but respecting their expertise and building systems where they can influence and lead.

We're really proud of the young people who've already played a part in shaping this strategy. We need to build on their ideas, input and energy that shaped this strategy, and to keep listening, keep involving, and keep improving.

My hope is that this strategy not only strengthens our services, but also shows every child and young person in South Gloucestershire that their voice matters and they can make a difference.

CLLR SIMON JOHNSON
Cabinet Member for Children and Young People
South Gloucestershire Council





Introduction: **Nothing About Us Without Us**

Helping young people to have a voice – and ensuring they are at the heart of decision-making in South Gloucestershire – is the core focus of the Participation Team and of our Young Ambassadors. We are committed to the principles of co-production, working alongside young people as equal partners to shape the services and decisions that affect their lives. This includes our EPIC group (Experienced Panel in Care), our TCC group (Teen Care Council), our Youth Board and our two SEND partnership groups – all of which are spaces where young people don't just share their views but help co-design and influence real change.

Why this strategy matters:

We know the decisions made by South Gloucestershire Council affect your life – whether it's about education, youth services, children's services, mental health, public transport, or opportunities for the future.

But how often do young people get a **real say** in those decisions?

This strategy is about making sure that young people across South Gloucestershire have **real power** to shape their communities, influence decisions, and create positive change. This is about **your voice, your future**. We want young people to **co-create, co-produce, influence, and lead change** in their communities. This strategy will set out how we're going to make that happen over the next three years.

We don't do it for us, we do it for the others that come after us.

TJ EPIC Member aged 24.

Your message was clear:

In 2019, members of a Participation Strategy Workshop supported the pledge that drives everything in this strategy:

Nothing About Us Without Us

We've listened and we're acting. This isn't just a motto. It's a pledge that we will hold all council employees to.

We want all young people across South Gloucestershire to have the power to shape their communities, influence the services they use, and lead on what matters to them.

What this strategy will do



AMPLIFY

Make your voices louder, clearer, and impossible to ignore.



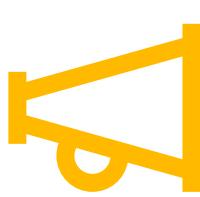
WORK TOGETHER

Build stronger partnerships between young people and adults.



LEAD CHANGE

Support you to co-design, challenge, and improve services.

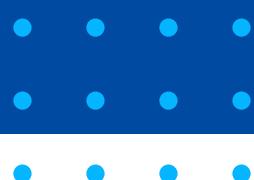


BE ACCOUNTABLE

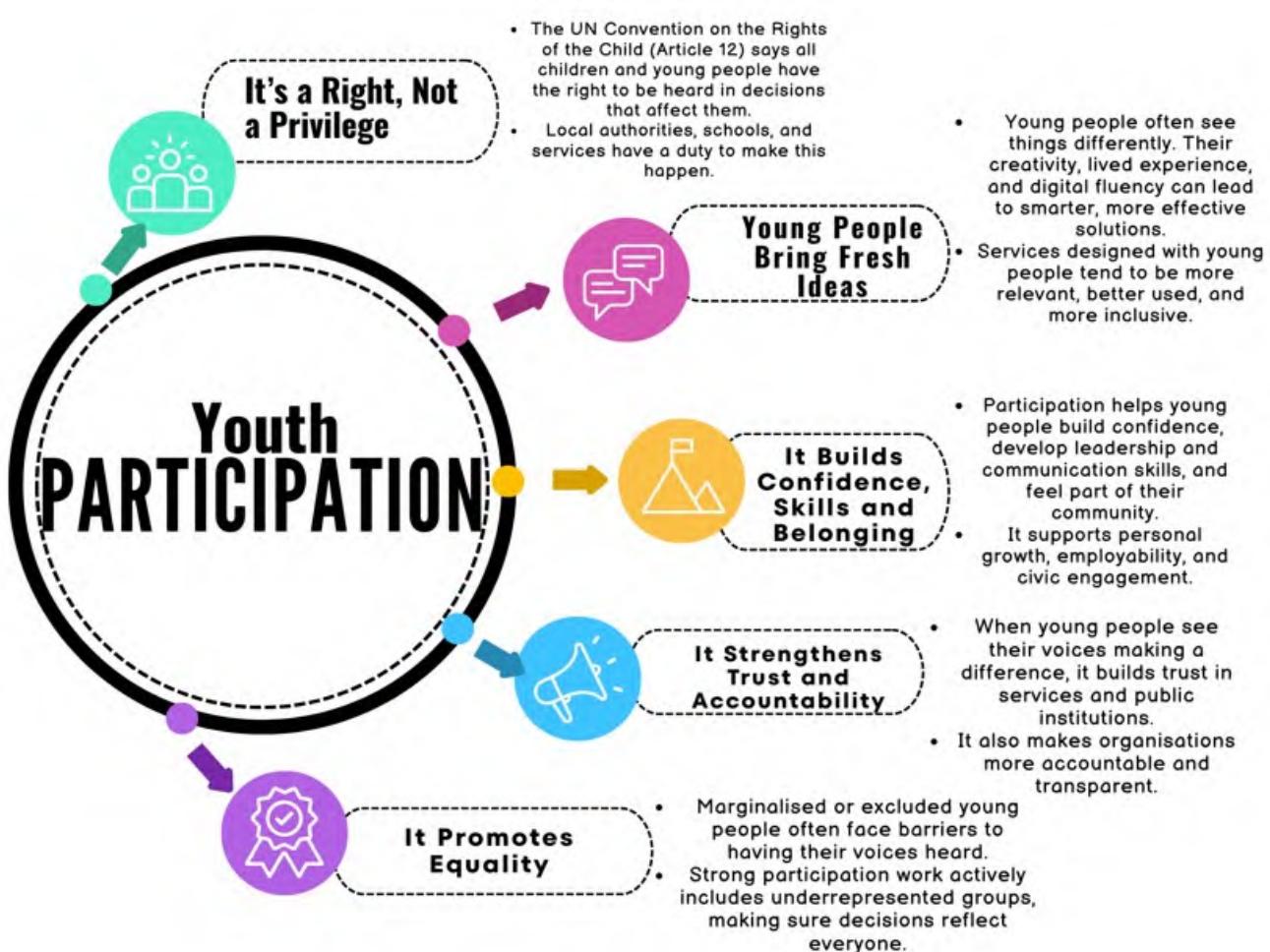
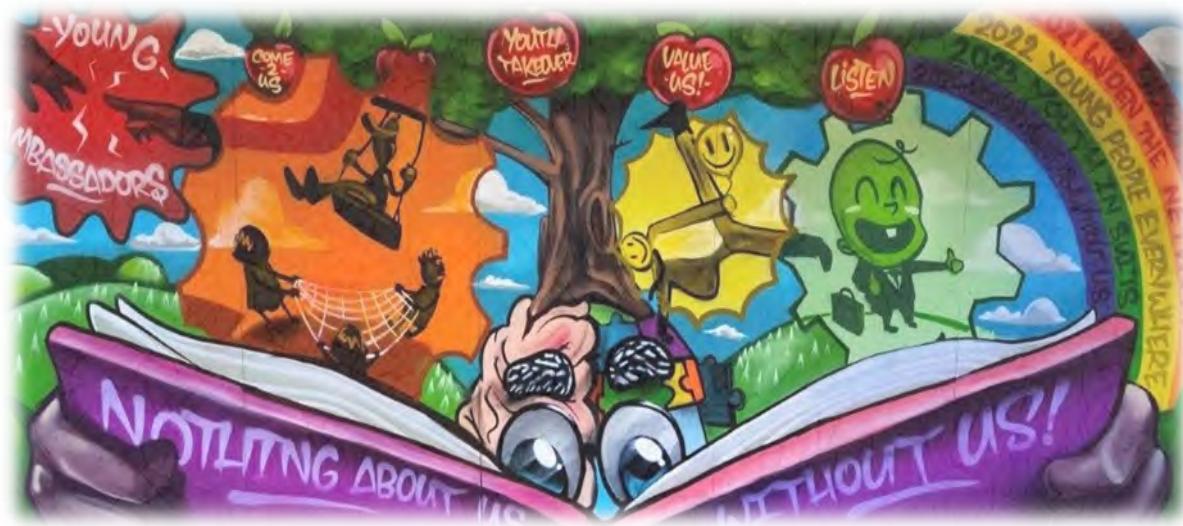
Show what's changed—and explain what hasn't.

What's Coming Up in This Strategy

- **Why Participation Matters**
- **Our shared vision for the future**
- **What young people have told us – You said, we Did.**
- **Our Model of Participation and how it links to wider models**
- **What we're currently doing**
- **The 3-year action plan**
- **How we'll track progress and know it's working**
- **Final Message**



■ This is your voice. Your future. Let's shape it together.



What is Youth Participation and Why Does It Matter?

The South Gloucestershire Children and Young People's Needs Assessment shows young people know what matters to them.

Mental health was a key theme – with calls for early, stigma-free support. Young people also highlighted the need for safe, affordable travel, access to healthy lifestyle advice (nutrition, exercise, sexual health, and substance misuse), and trusted adults with the right knowledge – including LGBTQ+ inclusion and healthy social media use.

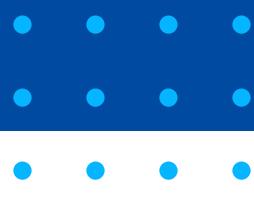
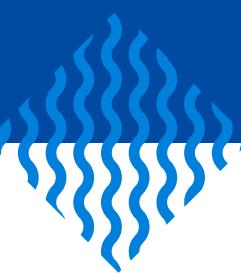
They want more safe spaces to socialise and support that reflects their lived experience.

The Needs Assessment also highlights the importance of focusing on vulnerable and less visible groups, using trauma-informed, shame-sensitive approaches. (p.40)

[Children and Young People's Needs Assessment | South Gloucestershire Council](#)

For pupils of school age with SEN, the most common need locally is for social, emotional, and mental health needs (25%) followed by speech, language, and communication needs (21%) (p. 23).





Our Shared Vision of South Glos – **An Area Where Every Young Person Feels Heard**

We want you to feel that South Gloucestershire is a place where young people are:

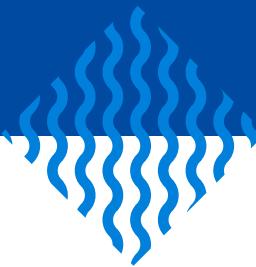
Listened to – Not just asked for their opinion, but genuinely heard, with their views shaping decisions through co-production.

Respected – Treated as experts in their own lives.

Involved – Helping to design, improve, and even run services that affect them.

Empowered – Given the skills, knowledge, and support to act and lead change.

This strategy isn't just words – **it's a plan for real action.**



It made me feel like I actually mattered—like people were listening for real.

Care-experienced young person, age 17.

Young people told us that that Participation is when:

We're involved from the start – not just at the end to approve something or "decide on the colour of a logo".

(EPIC Member, aged 24).

We have a say – "You can have a say in how you feel about certain things"

(Youth Board Member aged 14).

The future is considered – "Allowing us to push for our future in the way we want it to be".

(Youth Board Member aged 15).

We use our experience – "We can come together to discuss the problems we have faced whilst in care to bring about change to help children currently in care".

(EPIC Member, aged 21).

We celebrate Diversity – "We value all different types of people to address everyone's lived experiences"

(EPIC Member, aged 24).

There are group values – "We create an environment where there are group values and an ethos which can then be shared with the wider community of children in care (and professionals involved in our care)"

(EPIC Member, aged 24).

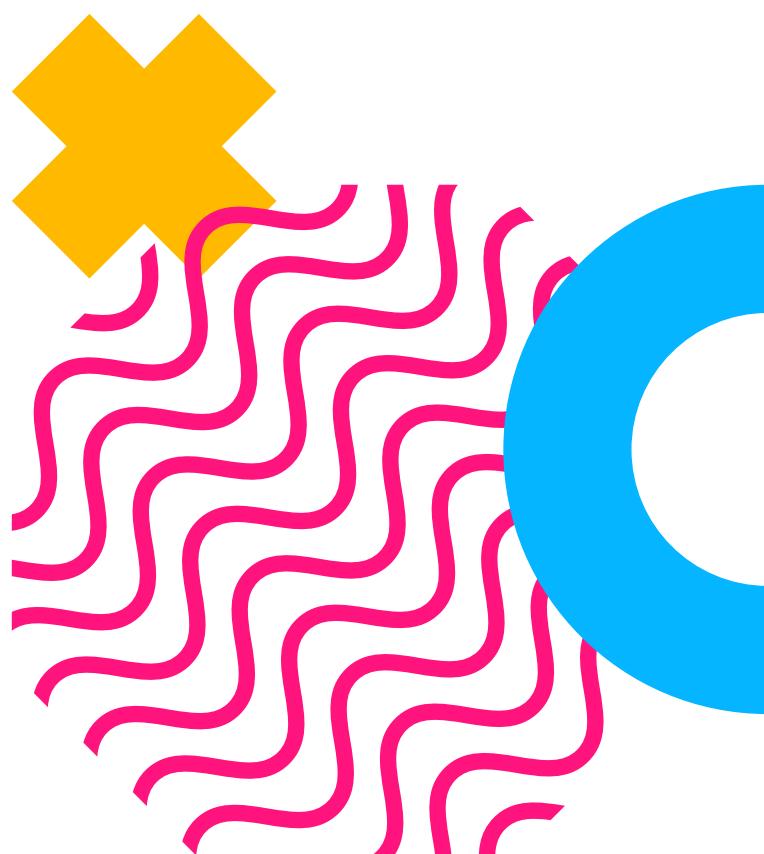
Young people told us what participation isn't (but can sometimes feel like):

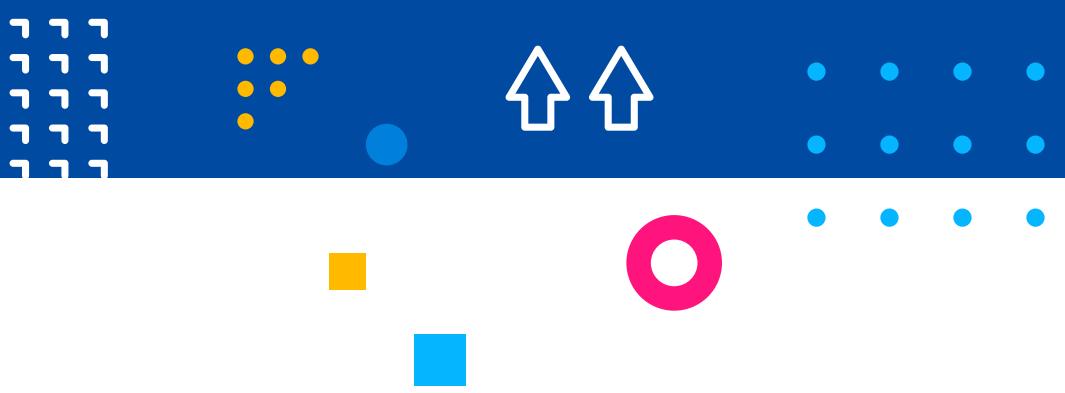
Understanding the purpose – "When the group becomes a social club or youth club. We are here to work to bring changes for children in care and the next generation of children in care"

(EPIC Member, aged 24).

Being Excluded – "Not being able to feel included and saying how you feel"

(Youth Board Member aged 14).





Our Model of Participation in South Glos:

Summary: The South Glos model is a localised interpretation of Lundy's Model of Participation (2007) – ensuring young people not only have a voice, but that it's meaningful and acted upon. The table on the following page outlines the connections between the two models.

Hart's ladder of Participation (1992) outlines 8 rungs of youth participation, ranging from **tokenism** to **youth-led shared decision-making**.

Connections between Hart's Participation Model and ours can be seen on the following page:





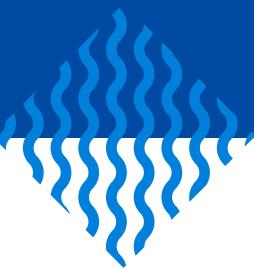
Links to wider Participation Models:

■ Lundy Model of Participation (2007)

LUNDY	HOW IT APPEARS IN THE SOUTH GLOS MODEL
Space – Safe, inclusive opportunities to express views	"Trust and Respect – Safe space" "Trained and versatile staff" "Considering diversity of culture and needs"
Voice – Support to express views freely and confidently	"Youth-centred listening" "Young person-led, independent voice protected" "Training and development opportunities"
Audience – Adults must actively listen	"Informing young people" "Inclusivity and trauma-informed practice" "Honesty and transparency"
Influence – Young people's views must be acted on and given weight	"Cycle of Feedback" ("You said, We did") "Realistic expectations and clear outcomes" "Young people as quality assurers"

■ Hart's Ladder of Participation (1992)

HART'S LADDER LEVEL	SOUTH GLOS MODEL LINK
Rung 8: Youth-initiated, shared decisions with adults	"Young person-led, independent voice" "Development" and "Cycle of Feedback"
Rung 7: Youth-initiated and directed	Opportunities for co-design and young people as quality assurers
Rung 6: Adult-initiated, shared decisions with youth	"Trust and respect" "Informing young people"
Lower rungs: Consultation or tokenism	Explicitly avoided through "clear expectations," "safe space," and "relevant feedback"

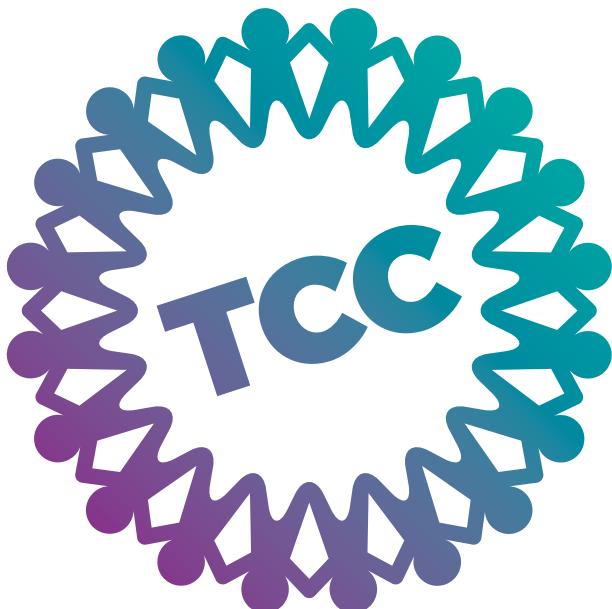


You Said, We Did – **What we've already achieved**

We're not starting from scratch! South Gloucestershire Council has already been working with young people in some important ways and have achieved a great deal:

“Nothing About Us Without Us” isn't just a slogan – it's a principle that guides everything we do. We are committed to working **with** young people, not just **for** them, ensuring they are equal partners in shaping the services and decisions that affect their lives.

Through groups like EPIC (Experienced Panel in Care), TCC (Teen Care Council), the South Gloucestershire Youth Board, and our two SEND partnership groups, young people meet regularly to take part in meaningful co-production – bringing their lived experience, insight and ideas to the heart of local decision-making.





Our Young Ambassadors play a vital role in this – acting as connectors between groups, supporting others to be heard, and leading on key areas of participation. They help create a culture where young people influence change, hold us accountable, and shape the direction of services across South Gloucestershire.

Feeling Safe:

Some young people shared concerns about knife crime and the impact of related content on social media which was increasing their anxiety. In response, we collaborated with the Youth Board to develop a knife crime survey, which was completed by 764 young people. The findings helped secure GRIP funding for the police, enabling increased patrols in key areas. We also partnered with the Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP), who engaged with local youth services to enhance support in the locations identified as unsafe by young people. As a result, additional knife amnesty boxes were installed across the community.

Corporate Parenting Board:

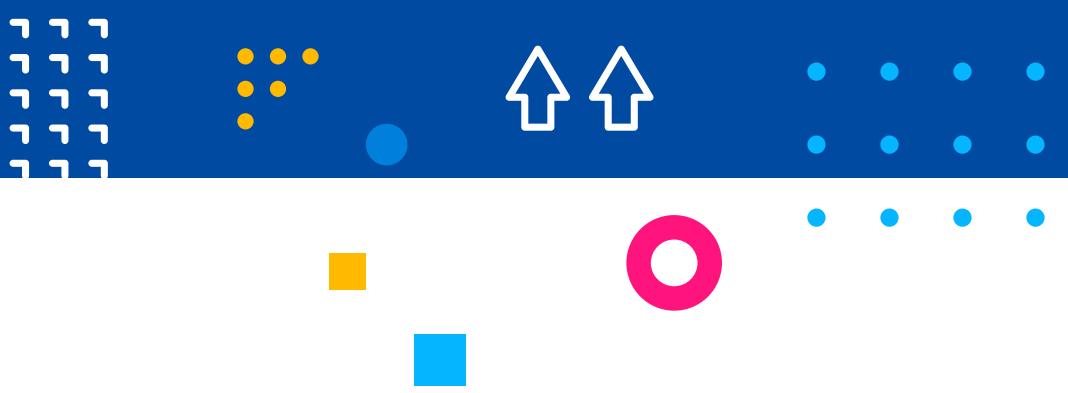
You told us that the Corporate Parenting Board needed to be easier to engage with and more accessible. You came up with some solutions that would help to achieve this including 'getting to know board members', 'less people', 'less noises', 'less brain work'. We're committed to making this happen and the Young Ambassadors have a key role to play in helping to achieve this.

Corporate Parenting Board Strategy:

You told us the strategy needed to be more accessible to young people, with clearer visuals and more use of colour. In response, we redesigned the document to reflect this feedback. You also agreed to write a Foreword, which was prioritised and placed at the very start of the strategy to highlight the importance of young people's voices.

Children's Residential Homes:

You were previously involved in the tendering process for our new Children's Residential Homes and expressed a strong interest in continuing to support young people as they move in. You visited the homes during development, shared your thoughts on the design and decoration, and are now helping to create personalised welcome hampers to ensure new residents feel valued and at home from day one.



Community Spaces:

Young people are often excluded from the planning process, despite studying, living, travelling, and working in our community. To address this, the Youth Board has been actively involved in shaping the future of local developments. They created a set of 'Young People's Principles' that will now be used by Planning Officers to help guide and inform decisions on new community developments.

Accessible Gym:

You told us that affordable gym memberships for young people would support mental health and wellbeing. In response, we connected you with a Council Member who helped secure an opportunity for you to present your ideas directly to the Circadian Trust Board.

Protected Characteristic:

You told us that Care Leavers should be recognised as a protected characteristic. We supported you to develop a project exploring protected characteristics which you then presented to Councillors. As a result of your work and advocacy, Care Leavers have now been granted Protected Characteristic Status.

SEND:

You told us that you wanted more safe spaces for young people with Special Educational Needs & Disabilities. We supported you to talk to the Commissioning Manager and other relevant Charities. We've also approved a 12-month follow-up grant to continue our co-production work with young people, in partnership with two local charities that support children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities. This funding will help ensure that young people with SEND have a meaningful voice and are actively involved in shaping the services that affect them.





What's Next? Our Big Goals for Youth Participation

■ We're stepping things up. Over the next three years, we'll:

1) Give Young People More Power in Decision-Making

Strengthen co-production between young people and the Corporate Parenting Board – with our Young Ambassadors leading by example in shaping more meaningful, authentic opportunities that build trust, respect, and shared accountability.

Embed youth voice across the Council, with Young Ambassadors acting as champions and advisors, supporting teams to involve young people earlier and more meaningfully in shaping services in a timely way.

Create **Financial Autonomy** where young people feel like they have a say over how money is spent within their groups.

Connect Young People locally and nationally – Our team alongside our Young Ambassadors will support young people to connect with others from around the region/country, helping to link them up with regional and national networks like CYPSA (Children

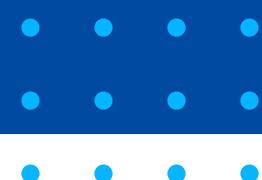
and Young People Self Advocacy group) that supports those with SEND to raise their voices beyond South Gloucestershire at a regional level.

2) Make It Easier for Young People to Get Involved

The team alongside our Young Ambassadors will help design and test new digital tools – including polls, platforms, and campaigns – so that all young people can **have their say, wherever they are**.

We'll run **pop-up consultation events** co-led by Young Ambassadors in schools, colleges, and youth & community spaces – reaching those who aren't already involved.

Supported by our Young Ambassadors, we will create youth-friendly **documents** in language young people can connect with.



3) Support Young People to Lead Change

We'll offer skill-building in citizenship (being part of your community), leadership, and decision-making – **shaped by what young people say they need**, and delivered in partnership with those who've already stepped up.

Young people who take part will leave with more than just good memories – they'll gain **recognition, awards, portfolios, and experiences** that help with future steps in life and work. Young Ambassadors will help shape how this works and what counts. Young people will keep portfolios of their work/achievements and gain **work experience opportunities**. We will finalise a 'Recognition, Incentives and Rewards' Guidance document to better recognise young people equally and consistently.

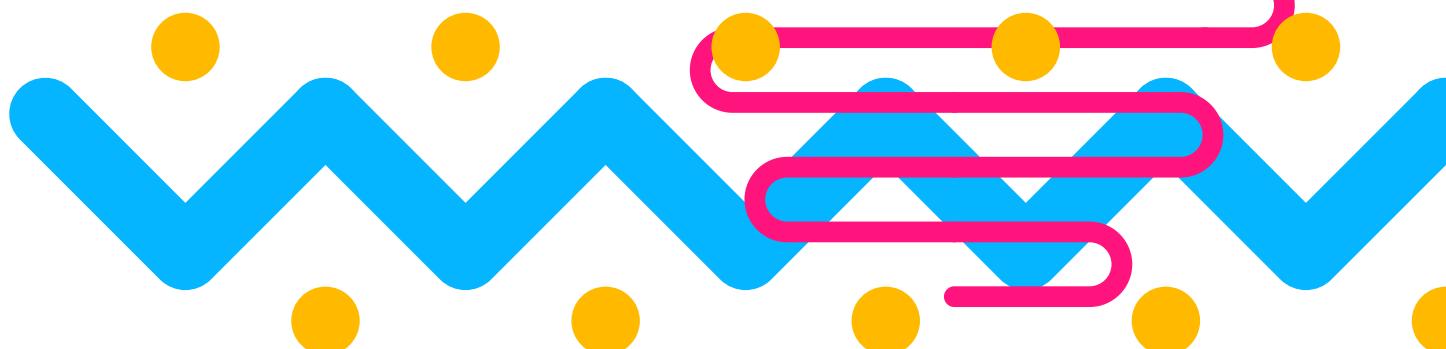
We'll partner with schools, youth clubs and community spaces – with **Young Ambassadors helping us build new pathways into participation** for more young people including those young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

4) Focus on Voices That Often Go Unheard

Young Ambassadors will play a leading role in supporting the team to reach underrepresented young people, including those from the global majority, Gypsy/Roma communities, young carers, children missing education, those with SEND, those in care/care leavers, and others whose voices aren't often heard.

Provide accessible and inclusive ways to participate – tailored to individual needs – such as alternative communication formats, BSL interpretation, disability support, different languages, and quiet or sensory-friendly spaces.

Young Ambassadors will host 'participation surgeries' and a mobile outreach offer, going to where young people are – schools, youth groups, and community settings – and listening on their terms.



5) Make Sure Participation Leads to Action

Together with our Young Ambassadors, we'll track the impact of what young people are saying – showing clearly what's changed and what hasn't and being honest when ideas can't be taken forward.

We'll co-create an annual **Youth Achievement Awards** that recognises the young people and projects making change happen – led and judged by young people themselves.

We will ensure senior managers attend our quarterly **YPI (Young People's Insights) group**, where they will **listen directly to young people**, respond to their feedback, and **commit to clear actions**.

Young Ambassadors will help us to hold the council accountable – asking the hard questions when promises aren't kept, and making sure decisions stay rooted in what young people say.

6) Making Our Projects Clearer and More Organised

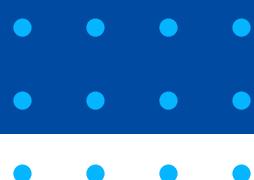
We're committed to improving how the Participation Team plans, manages, and delivers projects – making the process clearer, more consistent, and easier to engage with. That's why we're launching a new Participation Project Hub: a central space where projects will be clearly tracked from idea to impact.

The Hub will include:

- A transparent project proposal framework
- A visual timeline of upcoming initiatives
- A 'holding bay' for ideas awaiting launch
- An updated evaluation process that supports learning and accountability

This system will be available to colleagues via SharePoint and shared with young people through Participation Groups – so everyone can see what's coming up, how decisions are made, and how progress is being tracked. We will also write a regular Participation Newsletter to keep people informed of the good work happening.





How We'll Know It's Working

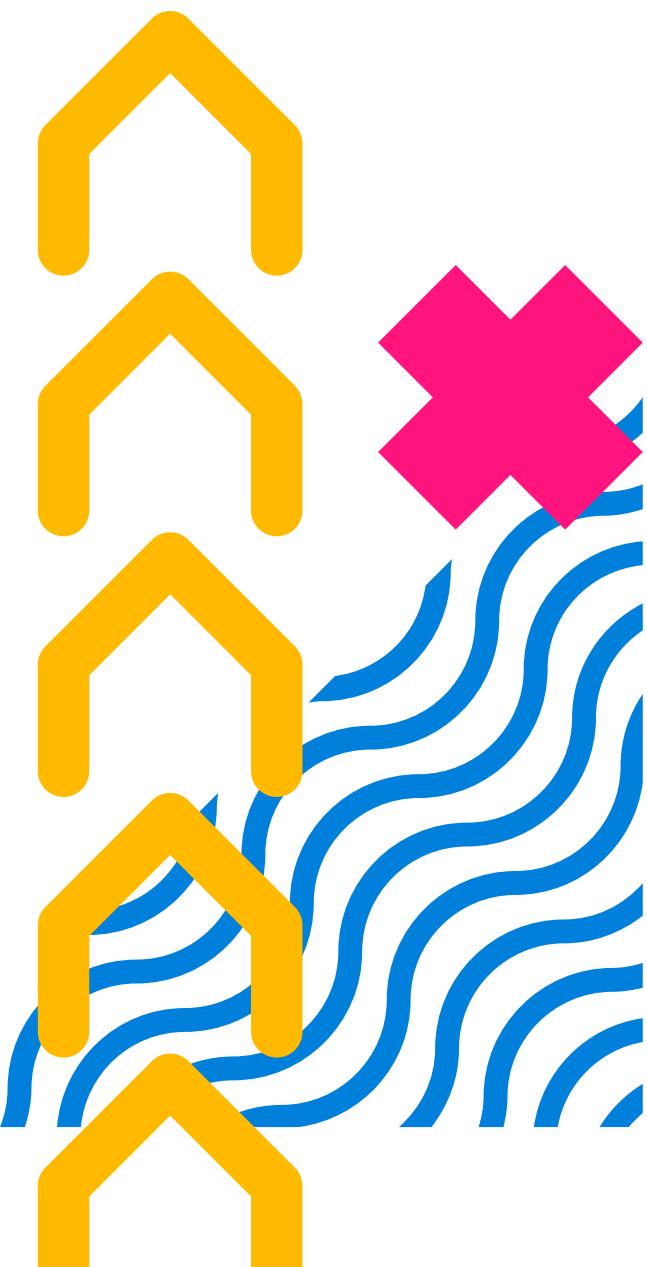
We won't just talk about participation—we'll measure it:

More young people involved – We'll create a new membership form and begin to track how many young people connect with our groups and participate in projects that we run. We will make sure we're reaching a diverse group.

Real changes made – We'll look at what ideas from young people have actually been turned into actions and will record this routinely using the 'You said, We Did' format.

Feedback from young people – You'll tell us whether you feel heard, respected, and involved and we'll track how your feedback changes. We will review how effective our engagement strategies are, using young people's feedback to improve our programmes and activities.

A stronger youth voice in South Glos
– Over time, we want all young people – including those with SEND and from diverse or underrepresented backgrounds to feel confident influencing decisions in their communities. Our goal is to increase the number of young people actively involved in co-producing change, ensuring their voices are heard and valued across a broader, more inclusive demographic.





Young people told us that we'll know it's working when...

Ziv 17/06/13 - 16 years old
We will know our projects are working because we will get our pitched and such, as well as seeing the changes in our own living, out and about.

Sophia
if it has an effect

If a project is ~~working~~ working, there are visible results (when you see a change in behaviour, mood or atmosphere) and the group their is conducting the project has the feeling that they are making progress or have achieved something after having gone through something together.

If you can see the results after
? (Wow the gym is better)
? + GYM A 4th
Dee 13

Then put our idea to use and try to help the town
Chloe 13

I think that it would mean that you feel progress / something has gone right due to the actions of the Council.

Ziv 17/06/13 - 16 years old
I know the council is listening to me and the other members of the Youth Board because all adults present make sure and try their hardest to make sure everyone's opinions are heard and actually listened to.

Final Message – **Let's Make This Happen!**

This isn't just the Council's strategy—it's yours.

If you're a young person in South Gloucestershire, we want you to be part of this movement.

GOT AN IDEA?

Tell us! We can be contacted on:

[✉️ youthparticipation@southglos.gov.uk](mailto:youthparticipation@southglos.gov.uk)

WANT TO BE INVOLVED?

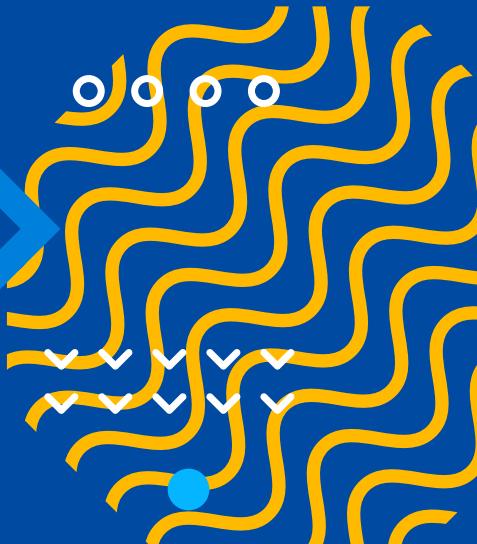
Join a project!

BECAUSE NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US.

This is about making South Gloucestershire a place where young people's voices aren't just heard—they make a difference. Let's do this together.

SEE SOMETHING THAT'S NOT WORKING?

Call it out!



+++