



Championing Children and Young People in England

PARTICIPATION STRATEGY

**Ensuring the voice of children and young people in
the work of the Office of the Children's Commissioner**

May 2013 – April 2014

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SECTION 1 – INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

The Office of the Children’s Commissioner (OCC) is England’s only statutory independent champion for children and young people. Our statutory duty is to promote awareness of the views and interests of children. Pending legislative changes, we are charged by the Secretary of State for Education to promote and protect children’s rights as recommended by the Dunford Review.

We listen to what children and young people tell us and press for their best interests to be the paramount consideration in all decisions that affect their lives. We say what must be said, to those with the power to change things for the better.

As outlined in our Business Plan 2013-2014, Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child - which states **all children and young people have a right to have their views heard on the decisions that affect their lives and for their views to be taken seriously** - is embedded across all the work of the OCC.

Amplify, the OCC’s children and young people’s advisory group, has been working with the Children’s Commissioner and the office since September 2010. It is through working with them that we have been able to reflect on and review our participation approaches at the OCC. Amplify are at the heart of this strategy and will play a key role in monitoring and reviewing the action-plan in Section 5.

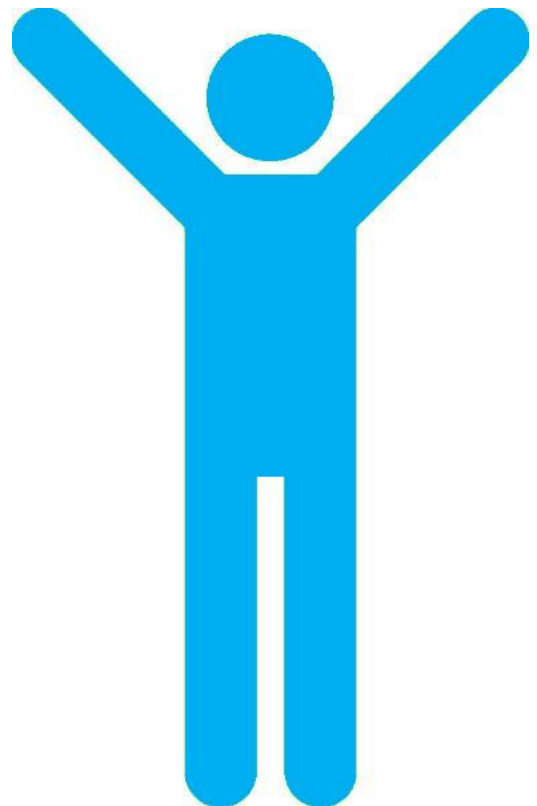
Article 12 is complemented and strengthened by the inter-related Articles on access to information, freedom of association and expression, respect for developing capacity, non-discrimination and safety. They enable the OCC to ensure the experiences and voices of children and young people meaningfully inform, influence and challenge our work and are essential to achieving our vision and mission.

Our Vision

A society where children’s and young people’s rights are realised, where their views shape decisions made about their lives and they respect the rights of others.

Our Mission

We will promote and protect the rights of children in England. We will do this by involving children and young people in our work and ensuring their voices are heard. We will use our statutory powers to undertake inquiries, and our position to engage, advise and influence those making decisions that affect children and young people.



Our Values

Participation – we listen to children, particularly those least likely to be heard and take their views into account in our work.

Positive in promoting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – we are positive in responding to challenges and opportunities to use the UNCRC to improve children's lives.

Strategic and objective – we know the big picture. We think about how best to make an impact, basing our work on rigorous analysis of the evidence; remaining free of political partiality, working in the spirit of the Paris Principles and General Comment No 2 of the UNCRC.

Equality – we value diversity and respect the dignity of everyone with whom we engage. We acknowledge, champion and celebrate diversity, difference, tolerance and open mindedness. We recognise the multitude of views and perspectives held by children, young people, and those who influence their lives.



SECTION 2 – PRIORITIES, AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Strategic priorities

We will support children and young people to have a real impact on the development and implementation of policies locally and nationally by being active, engaged and valued participants in the work of the Office of the Children's Commissioner at all levels.

We are committed to enabling children and young people to participate in our work, from a strategic level through to their involvement in individual projects. We value the experience and contribution of every child and young person we work with. Their experience and contribution are central to our work.

OCC Strategic Plan 2012-2014

This means children and young people's views and experiences are embedded in the work of OCC to achieve its three strategic priorities:

- 1. Tackling inequality and child poverty through promoting and realising children's rights.*
- 2. Protecting children and young people from exploitation and abuse.*
- 3. Running a highly efficient and effective organisation that maximises the resources we have to help children and young people.*

OCC Strategic Plan 2012-2014

Aims

We will report the voices and concerns of children and young people, through Amplify (the Children's Commissioner's children and young people's advisory group), Children's Commissioner's Takeover Day, and the active participation of children and young people in all our work programmes.

OCC Strategic Plan 2012-2014

What will we do to achieve our priorities, aims and objectives?

- 1. Engage and involve the children and young people who are most likely to be affected or influence our work, this will include children and young people:**
 - from vulnerable or marginalised groups e.g. children and young people who are living in poverty or who are homeless
 - with specific experiences and views e.g. children and young people who have experience of school exclusions or children in care
 - whose voices are less likely to be heard e.g. children seeking asylum or children who have been involved in the criminal justice system
 - who fall into the protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010 e.g. disabled children and young people or Gypsy, Traveller and Roma children and young people.
- 2. Identify for each policy or project area the most appropriate and meaningful approach for ensuring the voice of children and young people informs and influences our work.**

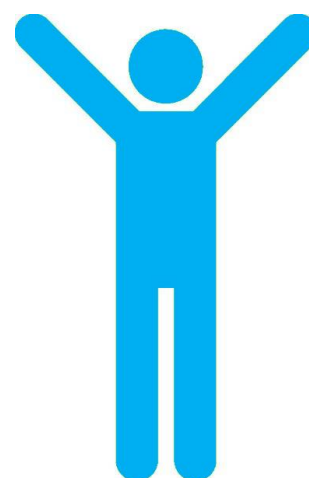
The starting point will be at the planning stage for any piece of work and specifically the project initiation stage:

At the initial planning stage for any piece of work or new project we will look to what degree we can effectively engage with children and young people. We will aim to provide children and young people with the best information that will enable their voice to be heard in the decisions that affect their lives through considered consultations and meaningful involvement activities. We will increase opportunities for shared decision-making with children and young people, and children and young people initiated and directed projects.

We will refer to and be guided by our 'Wheel of Participation'; inform, consult and involve which is based on Phil Treseder's Degrees of Participation. Using this wheel helps to identify how and in what way children and young people will be involved in any piece of work. It also reflects that it is not always helpful to imply that one level of participation is better than the other - it very much will depend on the project and on how children and young people wish and are ready to engage (see Appendix for diagram).

Specifically this will include:

- commissioning research and drawing upon existing research
- working with Amplify - the Children's Commissioner's children and young people's advisory group
- working in partnership with organisations that support and work with children and young people; primarily through our participation network to make effective use of our online forum but also for our direct work with relevant groups
- developing and supporting participation projects that facilitate inclusive, sensitive and interactive engagement methods.



3. Principles for achieving Article 12

1. All projects and activities of OCC are informed and influenced by the views and experiences of children and young people.
2. Relevant, timely recognition and feedback are given to all children and young people contributing to our work.
3. Effective monitoring and evaluation to identify and measure the quality and impact of what we do.



SECTION 3 – ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

This section is included in the Safeguarding Policy 2012

Children and young people are engaged and involved with us in many different ways and on many different levels. For example they may visit our website, email us directly, attend events, gain work experience, support recruitment and procurement activities, take part in research and directly participate in our projects and activities. This includes their involvement in our children's and young people's advisory group, Amplify; through planned activities via contacts in our participation network; and Children's Commissioner's Takeover Day.

Whenever children and young people work with or reach out to us, we want them to be safe, feel secure and trust that we will do whatever we can to create a listening, supportive and welcoming environment and protect them from harm. Our approach and procedures to safeguarding have been developed with the NSPCC and have informed this strategy and all our participation activities. We will create a climate of mutual respect, where children and young people feel that they will be listened to, and where their concerns about their welfare will be taken seriously.

We actively seek to involve children and young people in planning and developing our projects and activities. This helps develop their own skills and capacity for identifying and reducing risks and creating a safer environment for themselves and their peers.

Our aim is to have, and to be seen to have, the very highest standards in safeguarding children and young people.

All participation work with children and young people will be informed by, and explicitly demonstrate, an ethical value framework based on the following principles:

- 1. Respect for the rights of children and young people:** Projects and research will promote children's rights. No activity or project that breaches, or supports others in breaching, children's rights will be undertaken.
- 2. Ensuring the voices of children and young people are heard:** Children and young people have the right, under the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC Article 12) to be listened to when decisions that affect them are made. To support this right, the Office the Children's Commissioner involves children and young people in the design and delivery of projects wherever possible. Children and young people's views must be represented accurately and faithfully and, where possible, by them directly. We will check, wherever possible, that we have understood what they have

told us and report back to them on work to which they have contributed.

- 3. Promoting wellbeing, ensuring safety and avoiding harm:** All Office of the Children's Commissioner projects and activities, including research and participation, work to ensure as far as we can do so the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. Children and young people should feel protected and supported when they are engaged with us. We will recognise the potential for risk or harm arising from our work and strive to prevent this from occurring. These efforts will apply to all those children and young people with whom we engage in any capacity.

'Harm' refers to any negative impact on an individual's mental, emotional or physical wellbeing. It can also arise from and include causing people distress, embarrassment or humiliation, anxiety or loss of self-esteem. In avoiding harm, we include a responsibility for the physical safety of those involved in a project or activity.

The ethical approach and requirements for supporting children and young people involved in all project and research work for OCC will be expected to be detailed in tender documents. In respect of safeguarding, these will attend to such issues as:

- a. Arrangements for support and accompaniment for young people taking part in an activity.
 - b. The management of interviews and group sessions which may lead to distress for children and young people; including debriefing and checking at the conclusion of the session.
 - c. Access to people and organisations offering advice and support to young people.
- 4. Informed consent, voluntary participation and feedback:** Gaining informed consent is central to any project or research process undertaken by the Office of the Children's Commissioner. Those who participate in research or projects must understand exactly what this involves. They have the freedom not to participate and to withdraw at any time without negative consequences. OCC will provide feedback to all children and young people who contribute and support our work.

Consent must be negotiated appropriately with regard to the age and understanding of those involved. OCC general principles are:

- a. A child or young person's consent is always required
 - b. If the child is 15 years or under, the consent of a parent/carer is also required
 - c. When the young person reaches the age of 16, they can consent on their own behalf and do not need the consent of a parent/carer (although we would always prefer to have parental/carer consent and support where possible).
- 5. Confidentiality:** The privacy of participants must be respected in all cases except where there are child protection concerns. Adults are responsible for ensuring that information about the child will not be passed on unless there is a concern that this child or another child are being harmed or are at risk of harm. This explanation of our policy must be given to children and young people at the earliest and most appropriate point of contact.

The anonymity of participants in projects and research through OCC must be respected

and protected and data protection procedures adhered to.

Transcribers and translators must be subject to a confidentiality agreement. Relevant checks (Disclosure and Barring Service etc) will apply to all temporary staff and contractors, in addition to all employed staff. (See Staff Handbook and Recruitment Policy).

- 6. Equality and diversity:** All research and projects must be developed and conducted with respect and regard to similarities and differences across individuals and groups: these would embrace age, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, disability, religion, culture, language and personal and family circumstances. This means that those engaged in research and other projects must endeavour to avoid prejudice, stereotyping, exclusion and discrimination against children and young people. (This is in accordance with UNCRC Article 2: 1. States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status. 2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members.)

We work to avoid the further marginalisation of under-represented groups and seek to actively remove barriers that might prevent their participation and facilitate their meaningful engagement with our work. This will be done through considered planning and support for individual and group needs and working in partnership with organisations with specialist knowledge and experience.



SECTION 4 – GUIDANCE FOR WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

This section is included in the Staff Handbook and the Safeguarding Policy 2012

All staff and adults working for and on behalf of the Office of the Children’s Commissioner will benefit from specific guidance that will help them to work with children and young people in a safe, respectful and supportive way. The guidance below has been developed to provide advice which helps to protect children, and also identify any practices which could be mistakenly interpreted. This guidance provides standards which will help all adults to monitor their own behaviour and to identify inappropriate behaviour by others which might raise safeguarding concerns.

Those working for or on behalf of the OCC are in a position of trust - the public expect the highest standards. Adults should be aware that they may be seen as role models by children, and must act in an appropriate manner at all times. This guidance is also underpinned by key legislation and other rules for the protection of children: for example – the forbidding of any sexual relationship with a child encountered through work with OCC, even if they are of or above the age of consent, and that regarding the giving or receiving of gifts.

If in doubt, staff and other adults should always consider how an action or activity may be perceived as opposed to how it is intended.

Below are some specific guidelines on good practice for working with children and young people. They should be implemented within the positive framework of Section 3 above - key principles of ethical practice:

1. Climate and environment:

- Always try and plan in advance for meeting and working with children and young people. It will be useful to identify the factors that will assist you in effective planning e.g. ages or access and support needs
- Always work with children and young people in an open, safe and transparent way. Other adults must always know about the work you are doing with children
- Respect children and young people at all times; be aware of showing favouritism, disapproval or prejudice
- Always try to meet with children and young people in a work setting but if you are meeting somewhere else, make sure it is with their parents’ or carer’s knowledge and consent.

2. Personal behaviour:

- Seek support from your manager if you become concerned about a young person’s behaviour to you personally
- Consider your appearance, and dress appropriately for the task and the age group you are working with
- Always consider the appropriateness of your language. While the use of humour can help to diffuse a situation, avoid sarcasm, demeaning comments and suggestive remarks
- Do not smoke or drink alcohol whilst working with children and young people
- If you need to comfort a child or young person who has become distressed it is important that you do so in a way which is both age appropriate and respects their personal space. Never act in a way which may be perceived as threatening, intrusive, or over-familiar and

check with them before you act.

3. Communication and contact:

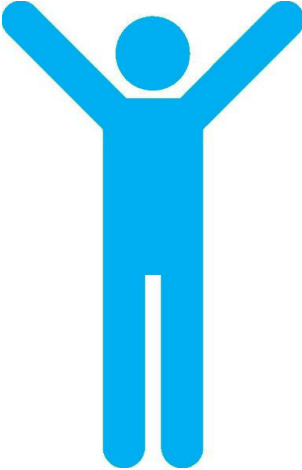
- Do not agree to keep any information relating to the harm of a child or young person confidential. Follow the procedures for reporting concerns
- Do not engage in or tolerate any inappropriate activity involving children and young people, whether based on talking or touching or potentially sexually provocative games
- The focus of the relationship with a child or young person you have met through your work must always remain on the work. The aim must never become to develop that into a friendship or relationship
- Do not exchange personal contact details, like phone numbers and email addresses with any children and young people you may meet through your work
- Do not engage with children and young people you have met through your work on social networking sites, e.g. Facebook. Be aware if you have a twitter account that some children and young people may follow you. Make it clear it is not a good idea - it is a personal account and they should follow the organisational account
- Never invite or allow a child or young person you have met through your work into your own home
- Do not offer to transport a child or young person alone in your car. In unavoidable circumstances ensure other responsible adults you work with have been informed and a record is made of the circumstance
- Avoid unobserved situations of one-to-one contact with a child or young person.

Some circumstances may arise which are potentially in conflict with this guidance: for example one to one contact with a child or giving them a lift in a car. These actions must be subject to discussion with a manager and a record kept of the decision. Staff and adults must always be mindful of situations which may lead them to be in a position which conflicts with this guidance. Staff who breach this guidance outside of these specific circumstances will be subject to disciplinary procedures.



SECTION 5 – ACTION PLAN 2013-2014

Actions identified in OCC Business Plan 2013-2014	Success Indicators	Protecting and promoting children's rights, strategic priority 3 in Strategic Plan 2012-2013
1. To ensure the views and experiences of children and young people inform and influence all our work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project plans, including for our Inquiries address where and how Article 12 will be realised • Children and young people from Amplify or the participation networks are supported to take part in commissioning and recruitment processes of OCC 	<p>To have a say in all matters affecting them, and have their views taken seriously (article 12);</p> <p>To be free to say what they think, seek and receive information and meet with other children and young people (articles 13 and 15);</p>
2. To embed Amplify's role as the Children's Commissioner's and OCC's children's and young people's advisory group, by enabling them to undertake their own project as well as informing and advising on all of the OCC's work and operations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amplify will meet three times in the year to support strategic thinking and to take forward their own project to contribute to OCC work • Amplify to engage with the secure on-line forum for communicate with OCC staff • Amplify working groups convened to support specific projects and work areas, including on the OCC website development, Children's Rights Impact Assessments (CRIAs) and Children's Commissioner's Takeover Day 	<p>To privacy and to have a private life (article 16);</p> <p>To receive reliable information that they can understand from the media (article 17).</p>
3. To extend our participation networks across the country to ensure we are including, and taking full account of the voices of children and young people across all areas of our work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contacts and relationships maintained and further developed with partners and stakeholders to support engagement and involvement activities with children and young people from vulnerable and less heard groups including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ children and young people seeking asylum ○ children in need and in care; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ children vulnerable to exclusion and NEET; ○ disabled children and young people; ○ children and young people living in households with low income or 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ who had experience of youth custody. 	
<p>4. To develop our work with children under the age of 11 in order to ensure that they have opportunities to support and contribute to our planning and programme delivery.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The participation network includes the involvement of organisations that work with children aged 5-11 years, including primary schools ● Ideas developed for a specific voice for children aged 7-11 years old from a Young Amplify. 	
<p>5. To involve and engage with children and young people in our consultation, research and policy development work, across all policy themes and programmes of work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Children and young people are engaged and involved at different levels in OCC work. This will include having considered and reflected their views in Government consultations and CRIA's ● Children's Commissioner Takeover Day 2013 promotes Article 12 and the positive benefits of involving children and young people in understanding and influencing how decisions are made across Government, local authorities, organisations and schools. 	
<p>6. To report the voices, concerns and positive contributions of children and young people, through highlighting their voices in our publications and other materials, through Amplify, and as part of our work around the Children's Commissioner's Takeover Day, its further development, evaluation and promotion.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identify and develop child and young person friendly methods of feedback and reporting on OCC work ● Produce, analyse and report information to help the monitoring and evaluation of participation. 	



SECTION 6 – MONITORING AND REVIEW

The Principal Participation Adviser will have the responsibility for developing implementing, monitoring and reviewing this strategy.

This strategy directly informs the work of all participation support staff at the OCC and their individual objectives are aligned to ensuring the action-plan is delivered.

Through the process of quarterly monitoring of the OCC business plan the Leadership Team at the OCC will be able to measure performance against the action-plan. This will involve engaging and evaluating impact with Amplify, all the OCC staff and partner organisations who help us deliver this work.

A summary report on performance of this strategy will be submitted to the Audit and Risk Committee as required.



SECTION 7 – FURTHER GUIDANCE

On reviewing the Participation Strategy for 2012-2013 the development of further guidance and resources in the following areas has been achieved:

- Voluntary participation and informed consent
- Involving children and young people with criminal records (in line with safeguarding policy)
- Planning for participation
- Risk assessment process and the risk assessment for the OCC offices
- Children's Commissioner Takeover Day – safeguarding guidance (in line with safeguarding policy)
- Equality and diversity monitoring process.

For 2013-2014 we will continue to develop guidance and resources on:

- Rewards and recognition, with a specific focus on an accreditation process for Amplify members
- Partnership working, with a specific focus on producing protocols for working with our participation network
- Creative and accessible methods of engagement to support fun, relevant and inclusive working with diverse groups of children and young people.

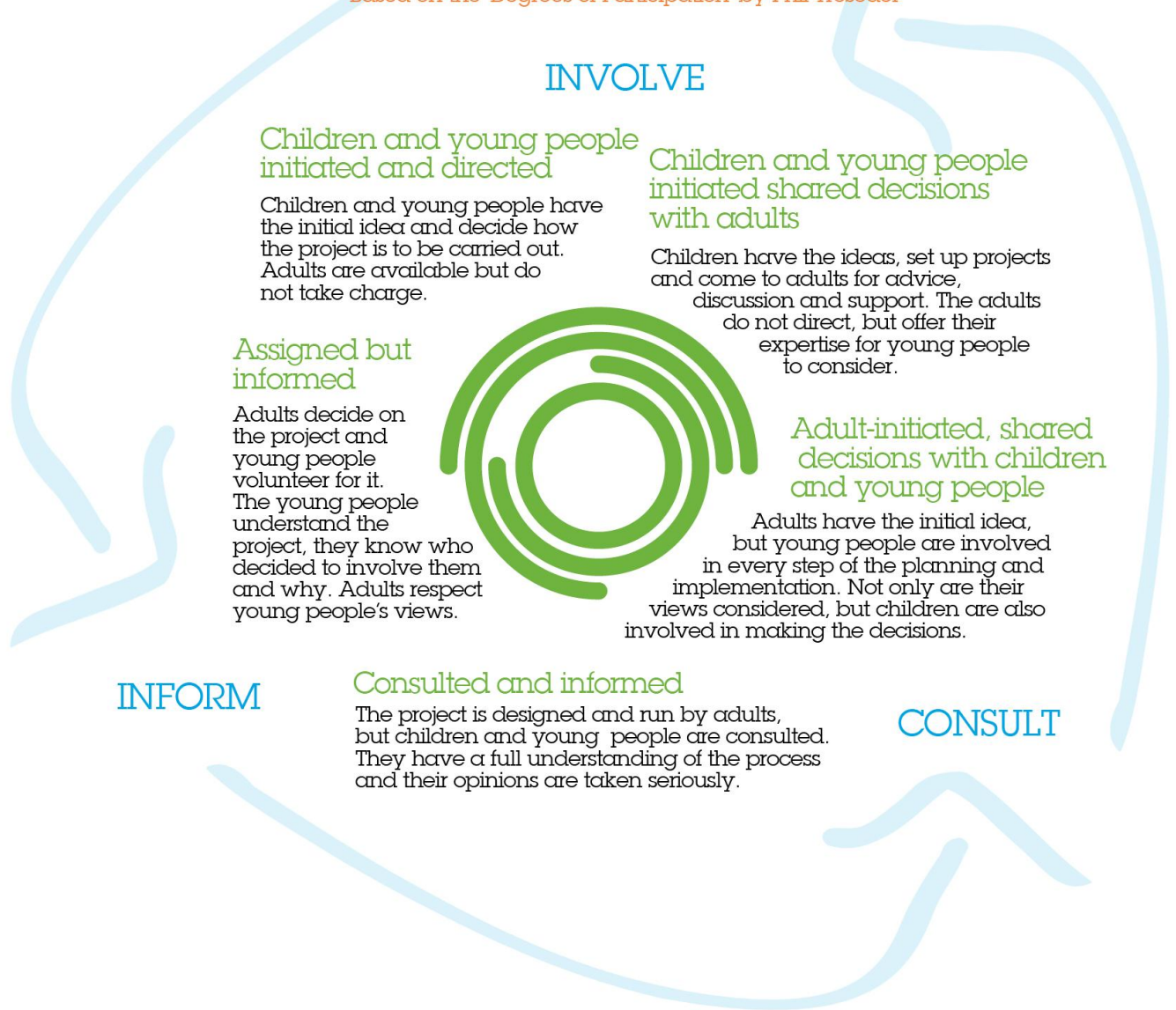
Information on these areas is available through contacting the Participation Team at OCC at info.request@childrenscommissioner.gsi.gov.uk.



APPENDIX – WHEEL OF PARTICIPATION:

Involving children and young people in decision making...

Based on the 'Degrees of Participation' by Phil Treseder



INVOLVE

Children and young people initiated and directed

Children and young people have the initial idea and decide how the project is to be carried out. Adults are available but do not take charge.

Children and young people initiated shared decisions with adults

Children have the ideas, set up projects and come to adults for advice, discussion and support. The adults do not direct, but offer their expertise for young people to consider.

Assigned but informed

Adults decide on the project and young people volunteer for it. The young people understand the project, they know who decided to involve them and why. Adults respect young people's views.

Adult-initiated, shared decisions with children and young people

Adults have the initial idea, but young people are involved in every step of the planning and implementation. Not only are their views considered, but children are also involved in making the decisions.

INFORM

Consulted and informed

The project is designed and run by adults, but children and young people are consulted. They have a full understanding of the process and their opinions are taken seriously.

CONSULT