CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN CARDIFF

Participation is a children's right. *Everyone aged 0 to 18 has the right to express their views on decisions that affect them and for those views to be taken seriously. Child Friendly Cardiff works across the Council, schools and partner organisations to help make that right real in everyday life.*

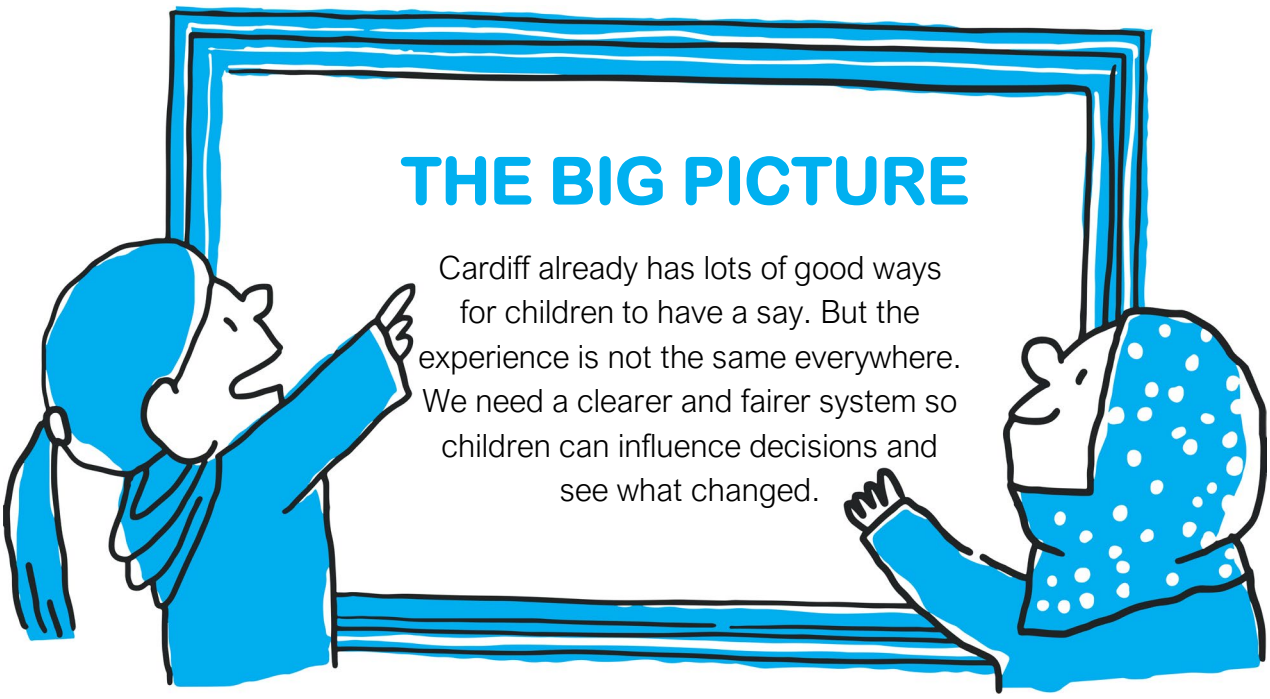
This review asked a simple question:

Do children in Cardiff get a real chance to influence decisions, and can they see what happened after they took part?

How we did the review?

We wanted a broad picture, so we did not rely on just one survey or one group. We brought together different types of evidence and looked for themes that came up again and again, while also making sure that important experiences from particular groups of children were not lost.

- 46 people from 29 organisations and services, plus six case studies, told us how children are involved in decisions across Council services, education, youth work, health and community organisations.
- More than 1,300 primary and secondary learners shared their views through the Cardiff 2030 learner survey. We also looked at School Health Research Network data (SHRN).
- Direct engagement with children and young people included peer-led discussions, group conversations and online work. This included young carers, care-experienced children, children seeking asylum, anxious learners and children in specialist or home education.
- We also used wider evidence from Rights Respecting Schools Award assessments, UNICEF UK, the Children's Commissioner for Wales and national learning about keeping children safe.



Four main things we learned

1. Not everyone gets the same chance to take part

Some children find it harder to take part than others. Barriers can include communication needs, disability, confidence, feeling safe, time, transport, cost and access to technology. Formal groups can also rely too much on the same confident or already-involved children.

2. Being heard does not always mean having an influence

Having a chance to speak does not always mean a child can change a decision. Some children were asked for their views after adults had already narrowed down the choices. Many were also unsure who could actually make the decision. The evidence suggests that children may feel they have less influence as they move through secondary school.

3. Children do not always know what happened next

Children are often not told what adults heard, what decision was made, what changed or why. Feedback was the clearest weakness in the review.

4. Children need safe ways to speak up and challenge

Children need safe and trusted ways to disagree, question decisions, complain, raise concerns and ask for help. This is also an important part of keeping children safe.

UNICEF UK and the Children's Commissioner for Wales found similar strengths and gaps. They also highlighted who gets involved, how feedback is given, how consistent the system is and how Cardiff shows what has changed.

What needs to change?

Based on what we heard, the review makes eight recommendations for improving how children and young people take part in decisions across Cardiff.

1. Create one shared approach to participation

Make sure Council services and other organisations follow the same clear approach when involving children and young people. This should use the Lundy Model and the National Participation Standards, which help make sure children have a real chance to speak, be listened to and make a difference.

2. Involve children earlier

Ask children for their views at the start of new policies, service changes and decisions, while there are still real choices they can influence.

3. Always give feedback

After asking children for their views, explain what was heard, what changed, what did not change, why, and what will happen next.

4. Make it easier for everyone to take part

Plan from the start for different ages, languages, disabilities, confidence levels, access to technology, transport, cost, time and different ways of communicating.

5. Make it clear who makes decisions

Explain who makes decisions, how children's views reach them, and how Cardiff Youth Council, schools, scrutiny and other groups connect to Council decision-making.

6. Make it safe to challenge decisions and ask for help

Make sure children can question decisions, complain, raise concerns and get trusted or independent help without being treated unfairly for speaking up.

7. Give adults the skills and support they need

Give Council staff, schools and partner organisations practical training, tools, examples and chances to learn from each other. This should include the National Participation Standards and the Lundy Model.

8. Show what changed

Do not only count how many children took part. Record what changed in decisions, services and children's experiences. Use a small number of School Healthy Research Network (SHRN) measures to check progress over time.



What happens now?

The listening has been done. Now the adults and organisations responsible for decisions need to act.

The recommendations will be turned into a practical Cardiff action plan. It will say what needs to happen, who is responsible, when it should happen and how we will check progress.

- **Turn the recommendations into action**. Agree what needs to change, who will do it and what needs to be put in place.
- **Make practical changes.** Build on what already works and create new ways of working where there are gaps across services, schools and partner organisations.
- **Check that adults follow through.** Look for evidence that things are really changing. Cardiff Youth Council could also check progress at agreed points and give an independent view from young people.

The aim is not to keep asking children the same questions. It is to make sure their views can lead to decisions and visible change.