Voice, data and measuring what matters to children: learning from the Bright Spots Programme

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There's so many things that need to change around the foster care system. It is so important that the government, the people who have the power to make a difference, take some time to listen to children and young people who have experienced being in the care system. To them, this is just a job, but this is our lives. They have so much power to change the way things are.

Chloe (Care experienced A National Voice Ambassador and Chair of ANV)

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3. Introduction

The Government response to the Independent review of Children's Social Care outlined a number of priority areas; one of these was the need to '*improve [the] use of technology and data to make better use of evidence and data*'[1]. To realise this ambition there is commitment to establish a Children's Social Care National Framework [Framework] and supporting Dashboard, the intention of this work is to:

- Set national direction for Children's Social Care, including describing the outcomes that should be achieved and setting out expectations for what leaders and practitioners in local authorities should do, with a view to raising the quality and improving the consistency of practice.
- Mainstream learning and evidence, spreading a growing understanding of what works from investment in recent years.
- Establish a stronger learning infrastructure and bring transparency to the system so that the impact of what happens in practice can be understood[2].

There will be an accompanying Data Strategy, which will set the long-term plan for transforming data in Children's Social Care to '*ensure we make better use of data to understand progress towards outcomes in the [Stable Homes Built on Love] strategy'.* Government have outlined that the Dashboard should allow comparison nationally and locally and that data should be available more frequently to support the learning loop.

As part of the work to meet these commitments the Data and Digital Solutions fund (DDSF) was launched, and local authority led projects commissioned on data improvement. One of these projects is focused on: '*Creating or improving specific data sets: the voice of children and families'*. A consortium of organisations led by North Tyneside is delivering the project and this insight paper, from Coram Voice, contributes to this work.

The insight paper draws on the learning from the Bright Spots Programme[3] and mapping work[4] with local authorities to inform the Government work on the Framework, Dashboard and Data Strategy. To do this it explores three interrelated areas:

1. Processes and practices to listen and respond to children's voice[5]

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[1] https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20230308122518mp_/https://childrenssocialcare.independent-review.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Recommendation-annexes.pdf

[2] https://esmeefairbairn.ams3.cdn.digitaloceanspaces.com/media/documents/National_Framework_Response_-_Leaving_Care_Learning_Programme.pdf

[3] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/bright-spots-programme/

[4] As part of the DDSF 1b project North Tyneside conducted a survey asking local authorities what they are already capturing in relation to children's voices and the systems they are using to do this (54 individuals from 36 local authorities responded; 3 follow up case studies were conducted – 10 representatives via 5 discussions)

[5] Aligning with the Children's Information project we define 'voice' broadly to mean views, wishes, feelings and expressions of lived experience. We recognise that 'data' can be interpreted differently: numbers and statistics used to populate data dashboards to inform services planning / statutory return but data can also be anything that is collected and documented such as case notes, what's app messages https://oxfordnuffieldstrategic.web.ox.ac.uk/article/conceptualising-childrens-voice-and-data

2. Measuring what care experienced children and young people say matters
3. How children's voices are heard and acted upon: examples of impact.

3.1. About Coram Voice

Coram Voice is a leading children's rights charity that get young voices heard in decisions that matter to them. It works to improve the lives of children in care, care leavers and others who depend upon the help of the state. We:

- make sure children know their rights and helps them to navigate the system, challenge decisions and make sure their rights and well-being are protected.
- empower children to have a role in decision-making processes.
- improve the system and help them know that someone is listening and taking action.

During almost fifty years of experience championing the voice of those in the care system we have seen that real and effective change can only happen when the voice of those with lived experience is at the heart of the change-making process.

3.2. About the Bright Spots Programme

The Bright Spots Programme was developed by Coram Voice in partnership with Professor Julie Selwyn at the Rees Centre, University of Oxford with funding from the Hadley Trust.

Back in 2013 we asked a seemingly straightforward research question: 'which local authorities provided a good care journey for their children in care?' – the question could not be answered from the available data[6]. Whilst there were objective measures none of these focused on what children themselves feel about their lives (subjective well-being).

The Programme has been working with children in care since 2013, and care leavers from 2017, to understand what needs to be in place to enable them to flourish.

The Programme helps local authorities to systematically gather the views of their children about the things that matter to them. Findings are used to influence practice, service development and strategic thinking.

The Programme uses four online surveys to capture the views of children in care (*Your Life, Your care* survey for each of the age groups 4-7yrs, 8-10yrs and 11-17yrs) and *Your Life Beyond Care* survey for care leavers. The surveys ask children and young people about their 'subjective well-being': how they feel about their lives at both the individual and interpersonal level. The questions are based on the *Bright Spots Well-Being Indicators*[7], a set of measures co-produced with children in care and care leavers about what makes their lives good.

FIGURE 1 BRIGHT SPOTS WELL-BEING INDICATORS

[6] https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/children/publications/2022/september/the-wellbeing-of-children-in-care-and-care-leavers-learning-from-the-bright-spots-programme-strategic-briefing-2022/

[7] Your Life, Your Care well-being indicators https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/bright-spots-programme/bright-spots-indicators-your-life-your-care/ and Your Life Beyond Care indicators https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/bright-spots-programme/bright-spots-indicators/

Your Life, Your Care Well-being indicators

Your Life Beyond Care Well-being indicators

The reliability and validity of the Bright Spots survey as a psychometrically robust tool to assess the subjective well-being of children in care has been examined[8]. The *Your Life, Your Care* and *Your Life Beyond Care* surveys have been through a rigorous research and development process: drawing on international research reviews, focus groups with care-experienced children and young people, consultation with a survey expert and a round-table discussion with professionals across the sector. The Bright Spots team piloted and used cognitive interviews to test the surveys with children and young people to ensure questions are age-appropriate and written in a way that young people can understand.

Some of the questions are the same as questions also asked by surveys of young people in the general population (e.g., Office for National Statistics, Children's Society and Health Behaviour of School-aged Children). This means that local authorities can compare and

[8] https://link.springer.com/epdf/10.1007/s12187-019-09658-y?author_access_token=2q9fp6Ztwn8NeEe_-PN0lPe4RwlQNchNByi7wbcMAY7yPemmkMB1_9IVN8RnAgKwmcsfUjMdVjbB0YlAetWOSoeYd4CxJb2NMcXZbNJQGh13bYCbGj_KpW3aBqeoUUJMn8oieQwhvmczD6EjKja4Gg%3D%3D

benchmark their Bright Spots survey findings against children and young people in the general population. Findings in an LA can also be compared to findings in other LAs.

The survey(s) are anonymous, optional, mainly delivered online[9] and use a 'trusted adult' methodology (to ensure children have the opportunity to make an informed choice about whether to take part and support available if they need). Completing the survey takes roughly 10 minutes.

To date the Bright Spots surveys have been completed by over 24,000 children from 80+ local authorities in the UK. Each year we run 20-30 surveys with around 15 local authorities that commission Coram Voice to run the Programme in their local areas and help them analyse and disseminate the findings.

Each local authority who takes part in the Bright Spots programme is supported to plan distribution of the survey to ensure the best response rates and receives a report detailing how their children in care / care leavers feel they are doing. The results provide a snapshot of how children are doing collectively at a point in time i.e., population level data (individual children are not identifiable).

FIGURE 2: BRIGHT SPOTS PROGRAMME CYCLE IN INDIVIDUAL LOCAL AUTHORITIES

The surveys help local authorities to improve children and young people's experience by focusing change where children say it is needed. Encouraging decision makers to act on what children and care leavers are reporting is a central part of the Bright Spots Programme both on a local and national level.

[9] The surveys can be accessed on any device connected to the Internet – no login details / password is needed to access. If Internet access is not available, or the child/ young person prefers doing the survey on paper, PDF copies of the surveys are made available to the local authority

The Bright Spots reports and publications[10] provide a rich source of information for both policy and practice. The work has been influential in encouraging a greater focus on children and young people's well-being and in listening to children and young people. We have collected a range of examples of how local authorities have responded to their local reports to address children and young people's well-being. These have been shared through peer learning seminars and our online resource bank[11]. Nationally the language of the programme has been adopted in the Care Review and in Ofsted's inspection framework.

[10] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/bright-spots-publications/
[11] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/

3.3. The problem: national and local Children's Social Care data misses out on Children's Voice

> *"The 'care system' collects data on what matters to itself, and not on what matters to the people who live in and around it" (The Promise, Scotland[12])*

Stable Homes Built on Love acknowledged there are '*data gaps that we want to address, which will require local areas to collect new data and adapt systems accordingly'.*

One of the data gaps and areas where data collection needs to be improved is 'children's voice'.

Policy and guidance to local authorities is clear – services should be child focused and the views of children should be represented and taken seriously. Practitioners and leaders agree on the importance of hearing and learning from children – there is frustration with the current availability of data on voice and a desire to improve[13]. The information currently collected by local authorities and Government tends to measure Children's Social Care system's performance with a focus on managing workflow[14]; this limits children (and their families) ability to be heard, reduces accountability and creates blind spots[15].

The voice of the child (and their family) is not consistently included in the data we use to describe children's journey through the social care system. Parental/carer or professionals' voice are often used as a proxy for children's voice[16]. It is stark that nowhere in the official statistics used to monitor the care system can you find information from young people themselves[17]; what they love doing, their hopes and feelings and how the children themselves feel they are doing. For example, in relation to care leavers Government collects just a small number of data items:

- Is the care leaver 'in touch' with the service;
- Is the care leaver in education / employment;
- What type of accommodation does the care leavers live in / is the accommodation considered 'suitable'.

There are problems with this approach:

– *Who* records the information – data is based only on professionals' judgements not care leavers' own view;

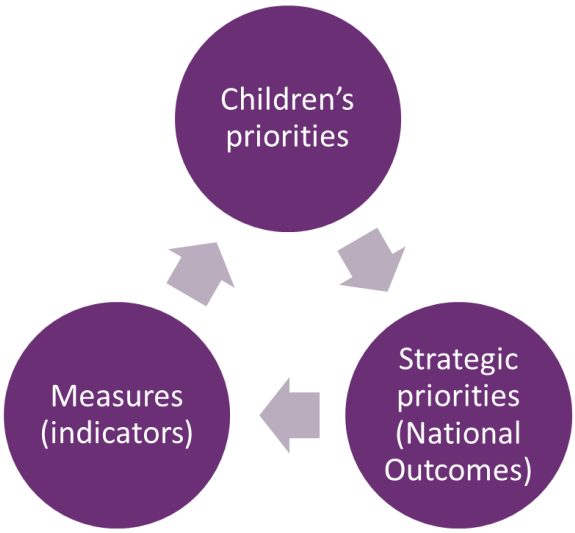
[12] https://thepromise.scot/the-promise-scotland/what-the-promise-scotland-does/change-projects/data/
[13] https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/children/news-views/2022/december/learning-is-a-team-sport/
[14] DDSF Project 1a presentation https://www.slideshare.net/RocioMendez59/standard-safeguarding-dataset-overview-for-cscdugpptx
[15] Department for Education, Local Authority Children's Social Care Data and Digital Solutions Fund Prospectus, October 2022
[16] https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/visibility-vulnerability-and-voice-the-importance-of-including-children-and-young-people-in-official-statistics/
[17] https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-looked-after-children

- *What* is collected – much of the information is based on objective measures and none of the information is based on what young people think is important in their lives;
- *How* the data can be used – by the time national data is published it is generally out of date.

The proposed Framework[18] and Dashboard contain only a very limited set of indicators (e.g., % of children living in foster care; stability of placements of children in care; % of care leavers in higher education). There are plans to develop additional indicators in relation to children's experiences by capturing their voices and ensuring focus is on what matters most to ensure children have stable, loving homes. This planned work is important. If the Dashboard provides only a partial description of what matters to children in and leaving care, then conversations about improving practice will also be partial[19].

To meaningfully capture children's views they cannot be explored in isolation as a discreet project. Strategic priorities (outcomes) need to align with what children say matters (children's priorities) and, in turn, b*e* joined up with what is measured (indicators). Without action and further changes to the proposed Framework and Dashboard on children's voice, we will continue to struggle to understand whether Children's Social Care is making children's lives better.

FIGURE 3 PRIORITIES AND MEASURES



[18] https://consult.education.gov.uk/children2019s-social-care-national-framework/childrens-social-care-national-framework/supporting_documents/Childrens%20Social%20Care%20National%20Framework%20Consultation%20Document%20February%202023.pdf

[19] https://esmeefairbairn.org.uk/latest-news/our-response-to-the-draft-childrens-social-care-national-framework/

3.4. Why listening and responding to Children's Voice is important

> *"Kids feel important when you involve them in stuff about their life." (Teenager in care, Bright Spots survey)*

> *"Since I came into care, I have had no control over any aspects of my life. Social services control where I live, what I do and how I do it. I hate living in care." (Teenager in care, Bright Spots Survey)*

Being able to choose and influence what we do in life is of fundamental importance. Involving children and young people in decision-making can profoundly affect their well-being[20]. Including children can help ensure decisions are responsive to their needs. Some young people report feeling empowered through participating, identifying increased confidence, feeling a greater sense of control and ownership of the planning process[21]. Having a sense of control over your life is linked to self-esteem and fewer mental health problems[22]. In our Bright Spots research, we found that feeling your voice was important and included in decision-making was associated with children in cares' improved well-being. For example, the odds of having 'very high' well-being increased if young people felt included in decision-making compared with those who did not feel involved; feeling included in decision-making was correlated with greater optimism about the future [23].

From a service development perspective, there are the following potential benefits to involving children and young people in the decision-making process:

- Improving the quality of services
- Helping services become more child-centred
- Generating enthusiasm and creativity
- Improving staff morale
- Raising the public profile of services
- Challenging the thinking of staff and decision-makers.[24]

However, despite the legislative framework and evidence on the positive impacts from having your voice heard and acted upon those in and leaving care often feel they have limited opportunities to participate in decisions. For example, less than half (43%) of those

[20] https://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/esss-outlines/frameworks-child-participation-social-care
[21] https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13575279.2018.1521378
[22] Huebner, E. S., Ash, C., & Laughlin, J. E. (2001). Life experiences, locus of control, and school satisfaction in adolescence. *Soc. Indic*. Res.55, 167–183.

Tangney, J. P., Baumeister, R. F., and Boone, A. L. (2004). *High self-control predicts good adjustment, less pathology, better grades, and interpersonal success*.

Nigg, J. T. (2017). *Annual research review: on the relations among self-regulation, self-control, executive functioning, effortful control, cognitive control, impulsivity, risk-taking, and inhibition for developmental psychopathology*. JCCP 58, 361–383.

[23] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/10091/
[24] https://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/esss-outlines/frameworks-child-participation-social-care

aged 8 to 17 'all or most of the time' felt included in the decisions social workers made about their lives[25]. Those considered 'more vulnerable' are less likely to be involved as staff prioritise their protection[26]. As a Children's Rights Charity, Coram Voice believe in every child's right to be heard and that their views should be taken seriously in line with Article 12 of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) – for Children's Social Care this means listening and responding both individually and collectively.

1. **Children's individual participation:** understanding children's experiences and how they are involved in decisions about their care, arrangements for day-to-day living and planning for their future
2. **Collective participation:** exploring childrens' collective views at a service level and how these influence development and delivery of the services children receive. In Children's Social Care there should be opportunities on a local (organisational) and national (system level)

FIGURE 4 LISTENING AND INFLUENCING CHANGE AT ALL LEVELS OF DECISION MAKING

3.5. Conceptual Framework: the Lundy Model of Participation

There is a commitment to the principle of children's voice throughout the *Stable Homes, Built with Love* strategy and Framework. But not enough is said about how to make this promise a reality i.e., what needs to be in place for decision makers in local Children's Social Care (and Government) to hear and act on the voices of children and young people.

This insight paper explores some of the key considerations when collecting and responding to children's voice based on our learning in the Bright Spots Programme. Our work is informed by the Lundy[27] Model of Participation, which provides a helpful structure to set up

[25] Selwyn, J & Briheim-Crookall, L (2022) 10,000 *Voices: the views of children in care on their well-being*, Coram Voice and Rees Centre, University of Oxford. https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/10091/

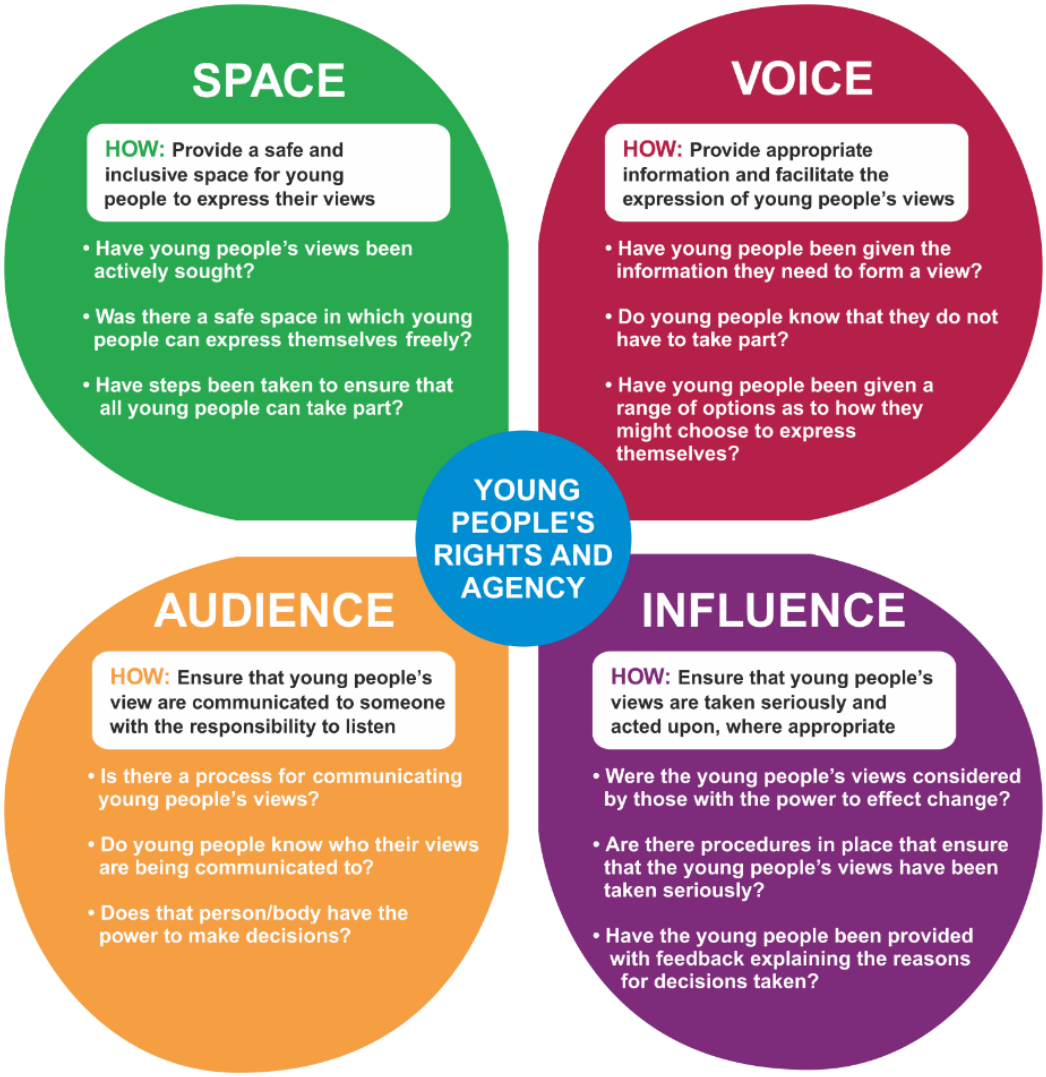
[26] Van Bijleveldet al, 2015 cited in https://oxfordnuffieldstrategic.web.ox.ac.uk/files/childrensinformationandvoiceslidespdf

[27] https://assets.gov.ie/24462/48a6f98a921446ad85829585389e57de.pdf

meaningful engagement and evaluate whether and how effective approaches are for listening and responding to voice.

Lundy's model of how to support young people's right to express their views and be listened to sets out core principles that can help organisations and individuals ensure all participation, whether through surveys, one-to-one interactions, group work or activity, is meaningful for all involved.

The Lundy Model focuses on four key areas to embed young people's rights to be heard (as set out in the UN Convention on the rights of the child). This Model guides our work in the Bright Spots Programme to ensure young people are given opportunities (**Space**) to have a say, given information, and supported to express their views (**Voice**) through the *Your Life, Your Care* and *Your Life Beyond Care* surveys and ongoing engagement. Professionals, including senior managers, get together with young people to listen to what they have to say through the Bright Spots Programme (**Audience**). Action plans are developed based on what young people say is important and they are involved in designing solutions (**Influence**).



4. Processes and practices to listen and respond to children's voice - developing a Children's Social Care system that continuously learns and improves

> *"Through the eyes of the children… participation was about having meaningful conversations with professionals who they trusted and who provided opportunities for them to have a say in what was going on. Participation for these children was as much about feeling that what they had to say mattered and was taken into account, rather than simply about them getting what they wanted. The outcome is therefore not necessarily what children are judging when considering their satisfaction with decision-making. Rather, the process is important to them in its own right. The children's narratives also told us that they needed support for participation to take place effectively".*[28]

It is clear that much more work is needed to ensure the Framework and Dashboard indicators capture children's voice. However, this cannot be done without the structures and systems to listen to and act on children and young people's views ('*once you hear it, you must act on it*[29]'). This section looks at learning from the Bright Spots Programme (and Coram Voice wider work) and mapping work undertaken as part of the DDSF project on processes and practices for listening and responding to children's voice and how this work can support local authorities to learn and improve.

What listening means to young people may be different to how this is commonly understood by adults. Young people often see listening as 'action'; so, if workers do not act on what they have heard then children can feel they have not been listened to[30].

Often what matters to children is what happens as a result of listening to them. However, as Coram Voice knows from our advocacy work, if time is taken to explain how and why decisions are made children can feel heard, even when what they have asked for cannot be realised.

Young people's voice is most actively nurtured through practice that promote relationships. The degree to which young people are at the centre of planning and decision-making depends on the capacity of practitioners, supported by the systems in which they train and work, to form relationships and communicate effectively with them.

How do you ensure all children get an opportunity to have their voices heard and acted upon? Firstly, there is no one specific activity that can embed children's voice in local

[28] https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Through_the_Eyes_of_a_Child.pdf
[29] https://tce.researchinpractice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Youth-voice-in-strategic-change-Booklet-FINAL.pdf
[30] https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/LGFR01/LGFR01.pdf

authority work[31], instead the important thing is to provide a range of different opportunities to be heard and taking action in response.

4.1. Ways of capturing children's views[32]

The following main structures and procedures have been identified in relation to children's **individual participation** in social care:

- One-to-one relationships and the day-to-day conversations workers/carers have with the children they support;
- Submission of their views in writing to assessment, planning and review meetings;
- Attending and being actively involved in meetings e.g., chairing own review;
- Using advocacy services to bring their views to the attention of decision-makers, including non-instructed advocacy for those children who cannot communicate their wishes and feelings directly;
- Engaging in a process of family-led decision-making;
- Making a complaint through a designated complaints procedure[33];
- Apps, social media or other online tools to enable children to communicate their wishes[34] [35];

[31] The Bright Spots Programme is just one way to gather feedback from children and young people about how they feel about their lives to inform decision making – we expect local authorities we work with to have a range of different ways to listen and respond to their children and young people.

[32] Ofsted list the various opportunities it takes to hear the views of children to inform their inspection process: direct testimony; views of representative groups; views expressed by others advocating for children e.g. foster carer; view of practitioners; views recorded in case files; analysis of surveys; reviewing complaints made by children) https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspecting-local-authority-childrens-services-from-2018/inspecting-local-authority-childrens-services#evaluation-criteria

[33] https://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/esss-outlines/frameworks-child-participation-social-care

[34] Review of sources of evidence on the views, experiences and perceptions of children in care and care leavers https://assets.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wpuploads/2017/08/CCO_NCB_RIP_CYP-voices-review.pdf

[35] As part of the DDSF project North Tyneside undertook a mapping exercise (survey to LAs) 24 responses from 18 LAs indicated children and young people had access to additional software or digital tools to record their wishes and feelings independently. The most common cited tool was Mind of My Own (8 of 18 LAs indicated they had this available for children); the next most common way for children to feedback was via digital forms (5 local authorities). After this a wide range of things were cited as in use but only by one or two local authorities e.g. using complaints, using doodle app; via messaging software such as what's app or social media LA specific pages on Facebook or Instagram page; Viewpoint; for disabled children Widgets were cited in one authority and another area had a care leaver app
https://mindofmyown.org.uk/
https://apps.apple.com/us/app/squiddle/id1161266643
https://www.rixwiki.org/
https://widgitonline.com/public/group/43317-als/users/144779-gina-horner/16110562-home-pecs
https://viewpointorg.com/myview-2/
https://apps.apple.com/gb/app/beeconnected/id6443715776

- More 'innovative' but less common ways include auto-ethnography approaches and or pictorial methods, whereby children in care share information about their day-today lives[36].

The following structures and procedures for **collective participation** have been identified:

- National, regional or local participation groups convened by service providers, central government or local authorities comprising children receiving services (e.g., local authority children in care councils; national groups such as 'A National Voice'; Young People's Benchmarking forum; Children's Commissioner etc[37]);
- Involving a panel of children in the recruitment of personnel;
- Involving children in the development and delivery of training;
- Including children's views in inspection reports;
- Consultations or research conducted with children in receipt of services e.g., gathering the views of children through the Bright Spots Programme;
- Creative projects that allow young people to express wishes, feelings and priorities[38];
- Child- or youth-led action research.[39]

NB: To date there appears to have been limited evaluation or monitoring to measure the effectiveness of individual and collective structures or procedures intended to support children.

The range of opportunities to hear children's voices need to provide children and young people with a safe inclusive space to have their voice heard. All need to be resourced and supported by skilled workers who can build trust and communicate with children and young people.

4.2. Supporting effective engagement – learning from the Bright Spots Programme

The Bright Spots Programme is one way to listen and respond to children in care and care leavers. Operating for over 10 years the Programme has evolved and refined the approach it uses to ensure as many children in care and care leavers as possible in a local authority have the opportunity to take part and have their voice heard. The Programme continues to think

[36] For example, Photo Voice project used photography and storytelling as a tool for advocacy and self-expression – creating space for care leavers and workers to reflect on their perspectives of what they may need from support services https://photovoice.org/care-leavers-in-focus-clif/

[37] ANV https://coramvoice.org.uk/get-involved/become-a-care-ambassador/; YPBMF https://members.leavingcare.org/landing/what-is-young-peoples-benchmarking-forum-ypbmf/; Children Commissioner's care experienced advisory board https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/blog/apply-to-be-on-the-childrens-commissioners-care-experienced-advisory-board/

[38] The Bright Spots resource bank includes lots of examples of the creative work undertaken by children e.g. Hull children in care council created a film https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/dream-on/; sculpture; prints and podcasts to share more about what makes life good and influence change in their local authority

[39] https://www.iriss.org.uk/resources/esss-outlines/frameworks-child-participation-social-care

carefully and creatively about *how* children's voice is heard, *who* collects the 'data' from children and *when* this is done. Here are some of the things the Programme has learnt about listening and responding to children's voices[40]:

- Prioritising listening and responding to children requires a culture that seeks out, listens to their experiences, and then treats the information as what matters most[41].

The evaluation of the Bright Spots Programme[42] identified a number of factors that help local authorities run a successful Programme:

- Support from senior management team
- Participation lead included in senior management structures
- Culture encourages challenge and reflective practice
- Culture recognises importance of listening to children and young people
- Children in care / care leaver forums
- Stable workforce
- Bright Spots champions

Barriers to running the Bright Spots Programme:

- High staff turnover (particularly at senior management level)
- Project lead doesn't have enough authority
- Poor transitions between social work teams
- Low profile of participation work/team in authority
- Lack of service wide 'buy in'.

4.2.1. Senior management commitment

We have learnt that **senior management commitment– those with the power to effect change - is needed from the start.**

- At the point of joining the Programme, local authorities must sign a 'service level agreement', which outlines the Programme expectations of commitment and engagement from senior management including Director level and Lead Councillor for Corporate Parenting to drive change through the Programme.
- Towards the start, a session is held with the senior leadership team to answer questions about the Programme and to initiate thinking early on, about what the local authority may do with the findings.
- An on-going role for the lead contact in the local authority is to keep partners and mangers updated at different stages.
- The message from the Programme to local authorities is simple: do not take part if you are not going to take action.

[40] There are many other guides re: meaningful and effective participation of children in decision-making e.g. https://rm.coe.int/let-s-decide-together-guide-to-meaningful-and-effective-engagement-of-/1680abb33e or https://www.cypcs.org.uk/wpcypcs/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Golden-Rules-young-people.pdf

[41] https://www.scotsman.com/news/opinion/columnists/scotland-needs-to-do-data-differently-to-understand-challenges-for-families-fiona-duncan-3979209

[42] https://www.education.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Evaluation-report-08.04.21.pdf

4.2.2. Timing

Think about when you take part in the Bright Spots Programme – do not do it too often and check it does not clash with other demands on children. The Bright Spots Programme is a cohort-wide survey of children's views. To avoid children feeling 'over surveyed' and to give local authorities time to respond to what children say we recommend the survey(s) should ideally be undertaken biannually. It is important to check there are no other survey demands on children (e.g. Ofsted; school surveys).

4.2.3. Commitment and resourcing

It is hard work – commit staff time, create capacity and provide resource. Local authorities taking part in the Bright Spots Programme need to provide a **project lead** whose role it is to champion the Bright Spots Programme internally and liaise with Coram Voice.

4.2.4. Planning

Each local authority sets up and **co-ordinates a working group** of key staff:

- The local authority working group has an important role: (1) to identify ways to promote the Programme and distribute the surveys and (2) explore responses to the surveys e.g. action plan and disseminate findings such as writing to all children 'you said, we did'.
- Membership of the working group varies but often includes representatives from: virtual school, quality assurance, looked after, fostering, residential, leaving care, participation, independent reviewing services, leads from specialist services e.g. young people with disabilities, asylum seeking children, health and well-being teams etc.
- Key questions for the working group:
    - Ways to ensure all children/young people have a named trusted adult
    - Thinking about who the 'less often heard from' young people may be
    - Identifying barriers to survey completion (e.g. other work, events, staff shortage/changes)
- The working group should explore ways to involve children in their work.
- Learning from the Programme has shown the benefits of making sure everyone knows that the local authority is taking part in the Programme and committed to listening and acting on the findings. Coram Voice provide resources to support this wider communications work e.g. template letter pack; guidance notes; info leaflets/presentations for staff briefings; text for internal intranet or newsletters etc. Identifying business support colleagues to help coordinate information is important. Local authorities are often inventive in terms of promoting local authority participation in the Programme[43].

[43] E.g. a local bakery made 'bright spots' biscuits; staff decorated their car in bright spot stickers; film nights; fun days have been held to tell children the Programme is taking place etc.

4.2.5. Communication

Develop child appropriate information to tell children about the Programme *"Children want age appropriate, accessible, bite sized and child-friendly information[44]".* Bright Spots and local authority partners need to take time to produce information to let children know about the Programme. Materials work best that are engaging and make the issues covered relatable and meaningful. Young people emphasise that information should be provided in lots of different formats (they are concerned that not all children have easy access to the internet) – e.g. posters, leaflets; via discussions with workers and films. Examples include:

- Film for young people – about what is Bright Spots https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WlIEjcIKUL8
- West Sussex – 100 seconds to tell you about the survey https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6mglVDEtyU8
- Bright Spots leaflet

The Programme has used a 'readability checker[45]' to help make our language clear. Our tips when writing for children are:

- Use **simple language** e.g. we changed 'answering the surveys will help us make systematic changes to our practice and policy' to 'your answers will help us improve our services'
- Use **active voice** e.g. we changed 'the survey was designed by children in care' to 'children in care designed the survey'
- Use **short sentences** e.g. we changed 'once we get the survey results back we'll discuss what we found out with all care leavers to hear what's important to work on' to 'when we've got the results, you can tell us what we need to work on.'

4.2.6. Consent

Every child must be made **aware of what is being asked of them, and why.** This can be done through an informed consent process; we make sure that we are transparent about what is happening with the data, who will read it and what it will be used for and that responses are anonymous to encourage respondents to complete them openly and honestly. There is information about the circumstances in which we would notify the local authority of any safeguarding concerns and information about where to turn if they are upset or worried by the questions in the surveys.

The survey has contact information for ChildLine on the instruction sheet and the final page of the survey for any child or young person who is worried or concerned about memories or feelings completing the survey may have brought up for them. The local authority can also add contact information for a named individual or local helpline on these pages.

[44] Read the summary from the session on the National Framework with 15 young people in care from across England https://mcusercontent.com/e92a4a068fab4bc9f2b26d94a/files/bf969af2-51a9-7a67-3003-c08f171eeb54/Session_1_The_Children_s_Social_Care_National_Framework_and_Dashboard_Feedback_Document.01.pdf

[45] Readability checker | The Writer

4.2.7. Who supports children to give their views?

Think carefully about *who* asks children for their views and ensure children have the support they need to give their views. Young people are most helpfully engaged by people who they trust and who they have had a chance to build up a trusting relationship with. To support the Bright Spots Programme work we have developed a 'trusted adult model'[46].

- For younger children in care and those who may need support to complete the survey the working group identify a trusted adult.
- A trusted adult is a professional known to the child or young person who presents the survey to them, tells them what it's about and gives them the support they need to complete the survey.
- All the questions in the survey are optional. If a child does not want to answer a question for any reason, they can skip it and move onto the next one. The first question is a consent question, and the rest of the survey will only open once the 'yes' option is selected.
- The trusted adult cannot be a child's own social worker/Personal Adviser or foster carer, as there are questions about them in the surveys.
- Some children or young people may feel confident to complete the whole survey on their own while the trusted adult waits. Some may need them to explain some of the questions whilst others may need each question to be read out to them and write down each answer (trusted adults are asked to write down exactly what children say without interpreting, explaining or paraphrasing what they have said).
- Trusted adults are given guidance on how to support children and young people with the survey, including avoiding drawing attention to a child's care status e.g. by pulling them out of class to complete the survey.
- We ask trusted adults to use their knowledge of the child they are supporting to help them complete the survey in a way that works for them.
- Many older children / care leavers do not need support to complete the survey but the trusted adult is a way to make sure support is available if needed after completion of the survey.
- A range of colleagues from across the service could be asked to act as trusted adults. Examples of trusted adults in local authorities include: designated teachers, SENCOs, IROs, youth workers, YOT, health visitors/looked after children nurses, supervising social workers, advocates, participation workers, support workers, education workers etc. This list is not exhaustive and will depend on the approach adopted by each local authority.
- The role of the trusted adult also encompasses safeguarding – if children make reference to something that is of concern, then local safeguarding procedures will apply.

[46] Local authorities who have taken part in Bright Spots reflect on their experiences of taking part in the Bright Spots Programme including trusted adult approach https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tyw5i5gQSgo

- Whilst social workers/PAs cannot help children to complete the survey they can help promote the opportunity and discuss what it is about with them and why it is a good opportunity to express their views.
- Guidance for 'trusted adults' is available (written information and film) and an online drop-in session for trusted adults is sometimes offered by local authorities to provided reassurance / answer questions.
    - Trusted adult video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CuISC89HZ7I
    - Trusted adult FAQ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fg_k7EHLsIQ

The most effective strategies include 'a plan for each young person' – who their trusted adult is, when and where they will meet with their trusted adult and a back-up plan in case circumstances change.

4.2.8. Survey period

Don't run the survey for too long – be focused and time-limited to avoid 'survey-fatigue'. Whilst each local authority needs to tailor the Bright Spots Programme to reflect their local context, we recommend making the planning stage of the Programme at least 4 weeks prior to the survey starting. During this planning period, all trusted adults should receive guidance about how to support children and young people to answer the surveys. We also recommend that Team Managers across the service put the Bright Spots surveys as a discussion point on team meeting agendas to encourage service-wide buy-in. We also recommend restricting the time the survey is open – usually 3 weeks with an optional extension of 1-2 weeks to ensure everyone stays focused. A key factor to achieving high response rates is visible support from Senior Management.

4.2.9. Active inclusion

Think about who may be left out and what you can do to adapt and support 'lesser heard groups'[47]**.** For example**:**

- Age – younger children from age 4 upwards are included in the Bright Spots Programme and the trusted adult model is an important way to offer support to this group.
- Different ways children communicate – the trusted adult model aims to support asylum seeking children, disabled children and others who may communicate in different ways be making sure someone who knows the child is available to support them to contribute their views.

[47] NCB report described situations in which services struggle to listen and respond – examples of 'lesser heard groups' included children: with significant or multiple disabilities; who had been involved with youth justice services; those identified as having experienced or being at risk of sexual abuse and exploitation; and child refugees and migrants. Those living in certain places such as secure settings; boarding schools; children in hostels and children living out of area https://assets.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wpuploads/2017/08/CCO_NCB_RIP_CYP-voices-review.pdf

- Children living in different places e.g. children in prison or living at distance from the authority – the working group needs to map how all children can be given the chance to take part.

4.2.10. Feedback loop and co-production

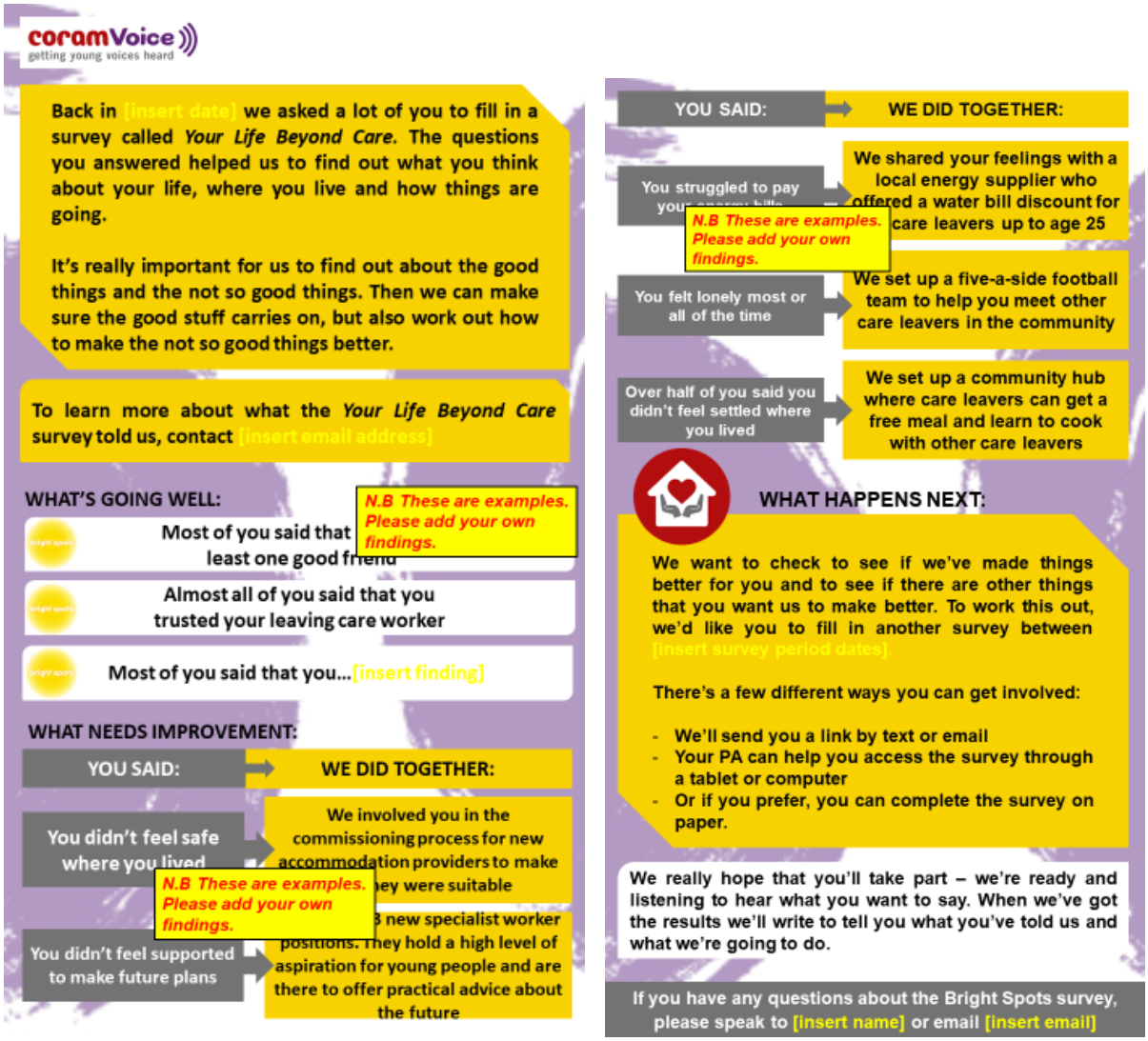
There must be a robust feedback loop so key findings and what is happening next is shared with children (and staff and partners). The Bright Spots team of researchers create a bespoke report for each local authority. The report compares the local authority's findings to the national average (children in care and care leavers in other authorities) as well as to findings from similar surveys in the general population.

The report will highlight 'Bright Spots' – areas of good practice where children and young people are flourishing – as well as indicating areas of improvement where further work may be needed. A member of the Bright Spots team is available to present on key findings from the report to encourage service wide discussion and exploration of the findings.

Each local authority is encouraged to communicate the findings to their young people and to seek their views on what needs to happen next. There are examples of how local authorities have communicated with young people in our resource bank[48] and a template 'you said, we did this together' summary.[49]

FIGURE 5 YOU SAID, WE DID TOGETHER TEMPLATE

[48] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/
[49] Dorset work on 'you said, we did together' https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/dorset-you-said-we-did-this-together/



Some local authorities have created a short film of their findings – they have then shared the videos online with children or in person with their children in care council. In other authorities workers have been asked to individually discuss the video (or written) summary of the Bright Spots findings with their young people.

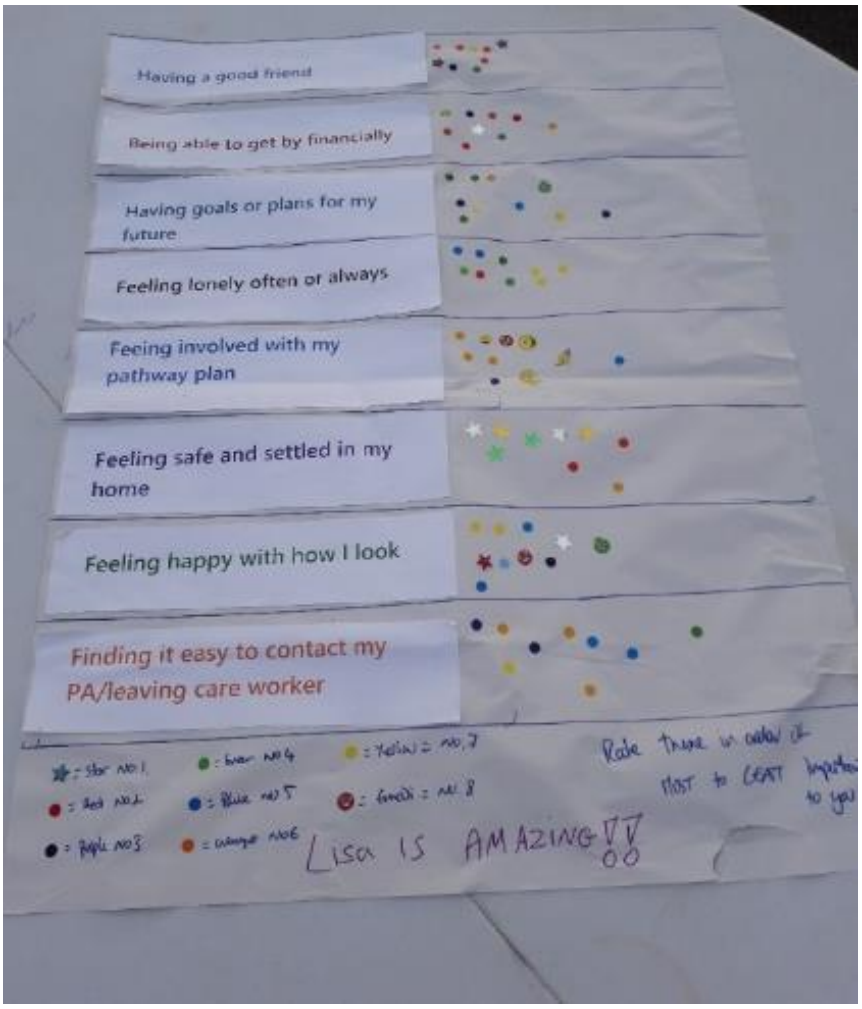
PRACTICE EXAMPLE	**North Tyneside** Personal Advisers[50] made sure on visits with their young people they took the time to tell them about the survey findings and get their views/feedback/ideas on what the priorities for action should be.

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	**Hull**'s film, aimed at children, shares what workers are planning to do in response[51] to the findings from the Bright Spots Programme. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ma2tE45e1Qs

[50] https://coramvoice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/North-Tyneside-PAs-gathering-priorities.pdf
[51] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/listening-and-responding-to-children-and-young-peoples-views/

Some local authorities hold creative sessions with their young people to review the findings and vote on their top priorities for action.

FIGURE 6 BRIGHT SPOTS FEEDBACK SESSION ACTIVITY WITH YOUNG PEOPLE – VOTING ON TOP PRIORITIES FOR ACTION



Bright Spots Programme work continues past the end of the survey date – there needs to be on-going ways to act on the findings and ways to keep children updated on how their voice is informing change. Children want to know what difference their feedback is making. Ongoing communication is encouraged so that young people and staff can see the progress that is being made. The Bright Spots feedback session should lead to the creation of an action plan based on the views and feelings of children and young people. We encourage co-production and involvement of young people in the creation of the action plan.

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	
	Oldham[52] – Young person friendly action plan updates were created. These were given to care leavers to ensure they were regularly updated on progress. The plans used heading such as 'you said…we are doing… what you will see'.

[52] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/young-person-friendly-plans/

5. Measuring what care experienced children and young people say matters

Understanding children and young people's lives and their experiences is very important in providing decision-makers with detailed and contextualised insight into whether what they provide is working and making a difference from the point of view of children and young people. The aim is for the Dashboard indicators to provide Government and local authorities with more insight into children's experiences in care by capturing their voices[53], so that managers and practitioners know more about how their young people are doing so they can improve services and focus resources on the right things.

However, as currently conceived, the proposed indicator set in the Dashboard does not reflect what we have learnt about what makes life good for care-experienced children. National data on care-experienced children and young people [54] gives only a partial picture of their lives. The focus is exclusively on adult perspectives and objective outcomes measures e.g. placement types and educational attainment. This information does not tell us anything about children and young people's own views and experiences ('their voice' is missing in official statistics[55]). Official datasets do not help us understand whether children and young people's well-being is improving. A more standardised approach to measuring well-being for children in care and care leavers would allow national comparison and the measurement of progress over time.

The Bright Spots Programme helps to address this gap in knowledge – it has identified what well-being is to children in care and care leavers and developed a means of measuring it. The Bright Spots Programme's validated measure of well-being tells us about what matters most to children in care and care leavers. Whilst this can inform the Government's development work on the Dashboard and what 'data items' could be collected to align more closely with what is important to children (children's 'voice) we need to firstly issue a note of caution.

CAUTIONARY NOTE – as the earlier section in this insight paper outlined we do not advocate voice without action. Data collection about children and young people needs to be linked to a child engagement framework where there is an ongoing dialogue with children and young people and, commitment to children being involved in interpreting the data and identifying what needs to be done in response.

[53] https://consult.education.gov.uk/children2019s-social-care-national-framework/childrens-social-care-national-framework/supporting_documents/Childrens%20Social%20Care%20National%20Framework%20Consultation%20Document%20February%202023.pdf

[54] https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/statistics-looked-after-children

[55] https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/visibility-vulnerability-and-voice-the-importance-of-including-children-and-young-people-in-official-statistics/

The long-term use of the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaires[56] as a key indicator in the Government national data set provides a cautionary tale. In many cases, local authorities collect this information for the sole purpose of supplying the national dataset, but do not fully utilise the information to inform individual children's care or services. Any Dataset containing indicators on children's voice must be grounded in local and national action not simply used for performance monitoring but instead utilised for learning and action (see section 6 for examples of impact resulting from children's voice).

5.1. Focus on well-being in the Dashboard - not satisfaction with services

> *It is not about how services are doing but how children in care and care leavers are doing (Bright Spots Programme)*

The purpose of all areas of policy and of actions in civil society is to improve lives. The question to ask is: does it improve people's lives and how do we know? [57] Taking a child into care is a major step, and one which places a responsibility on the state to ensure children grow up healthy and happy. There is a need for a Children's Social Care system that not only keeps children safe, but also helps them to flourish. Local authorities and Government want to know that the work they are doing makes a difference to the children they work with. Work needs to move beyond simply focusing on children's views of the services and support they receive to a wider lens focused on the full range of things that children say 'makes life good'.

> *Using a well-being lens to design and evaluate policy helps us assess if and how a policy works to improve people's lives…well-being in policy making means that whatever the intended outcome of a policy is, if it decreases well-being, we cannot call it a success. To evaluate policy fully, we must take into account its consequences on national, local and individual well-being[58]*

It is remarkable that we do not know whether a major intervention in their lives (removing them from their birth families) has been helpful from their own perspectives[59].

Governments, policy makers and the public have acknowledged the importance of well-being in recent years. For example, the Commission on Wellbeing and Policy recommended making well-being the Government's overriding objective when designing policy[60]. Subjective well-being has been included in the Green Book, the guidance issued by HM

[56] https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoptions/2022#releaseHeadlines-tables
[57] https://whatworkswellbeing.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/WEHP-full-report-Feb2020_.pdf
[58] https://whatworkswellbeing.org/blog/wellbeing-at-the-heart-of-policy-setting-out-the-wiser-priorities/#:~:text=A%20wellbeing%20approach%20to%20policy&text=Using%20a%20wellbeing%20lens%20to,opportunity%20to%20inform%20public%20spending.
[59] https://link.springer.com/epdf/10.1007/s12187-019-09658-y?author_access_token=2q9fp6Ztwn8NeEe_-PN0lPe4RwlQNchNByi7wbcMAY7yPemmkMB1_9IVN8RnAgKwmcsfUjMdVjbB0YlAetWOSoeYd4CxJb2NMcXZbNJQGh13bYCbGj_KpW3aBqeoUUJMn8oieQwhvmczD6EjKja4Gg%3D%3D
[60] https://whatworkswellbeing.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/WEHP-full-report-Feb2020_.pdf

Treasury on how to appraise policies, programmes and projects.[61] The Bright Spots Programme measures how well the care system enables young people to flourish at a local authority level.

5.1.1. What is well-being?

> *Wellbeing, put simply, is about 'how we are doing' as individuals, communities and as a nation and how sustainable that is for the future. (What Works Centre for Wellbeing[62])*

Well-being is more than just happiness or the absence of mental health problems. The term 'well-being[63]' is often used as an all-encompassing concept to describe the quality of people's lives. The measurement of well-being can be considered using two broad approaches:

- **Objective well-being** is defined outside of the individual e.g. household income; educational attainment;
- **Subjective well-being** is defined by asking the individual to assess their own well-being based on how they feel e.g., how satisfied they feel with life.

Subjective well-being in the Bright Spots Programme is defined as feeling good and doing well at an individual and interpersonal level. There are questions in the surveys about affect (e.g. how happy a child feels now), cognitive judgements (e.g. evaluations of relationships) and the inner world (e.g. life having meaning). In addition to questions that measure overarching well-being indicators, the surveys cover other domains that children and young people in and leaving care have told us are important to their lives.

5.2. Focus on what children and young people say matters

The Bright Spots Programme takes a children's rights perspective believing that to understand subjective well-being we needed to understand the meaning children gave to

[61] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-green-book-appraisal-and-evaluation-in-central-governent/the-green-book-2020

[62] https://whatworkswellbeing.wordpress.com/wellbeing-2/#:~:text=Wellbeing%2C%20put%20simply%2C%20is%20about,identified%20through%20a%20national%20debate.

[63] Well-being is separate to mental health. Well-being measures tend to have a global focus (cover how young people feel about lives as whole) or focus on specific areas of their life e.g. Office for National Statistics (ONS 4), Good Childhood index (Children's Society). Whereas mental health measures focus on specific behaviours or adverse affect/symptoms specific to mental health diagnosis e.g. Strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ). For mental health measures the predominant focus is on identifying whether the individual meets a criterion for diagnoses and treatment within clinical settings. While more holistic well-being measures can be used at an individual level they are also useful in the aggregate to look at broader societal trends. While there is a relationship between wellbeing and mental health, they are not simply the same. Some children may have low subjective wellbeing without symptoms that indicate mental ill-health, just as other children may enjoy high subjective wellbeing despite a clinical diagnosis.https://whatworkswellbeing.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/MCYPSW-Conceptual-framework-1.pdf

their own lives and solicit their opinions, attitudes and perceptions on what matters to them[64]. As part of the development process for the Programme, two sets of well-being indicators were co-created with children, which put children in care and care leavers experiences and voice at the heart of how we measure subjective well-being. The indicators are measured by the *'Your Life, Your Care'* survey (children in care aged 4 to 17)[65] and the '*Your Life Beyond Care'* survey (care leavers)[66].

Measuring subjective well-being through the Bright Spots Programme offers the opportunity to understand if children themselves think they are thriving and flourishing. The definition of well-being used in the context of children in care and care leavers should be grounded in their unique perspectives of what makes a difference to them. Listening and responding to what children and young people say makes their lives good provides an opportunity to (re)design services. The Bright Spots Programme allows local authorities to identify where children and young people feel they are doing well and areas for improvement (see section 6 for further information).

It is clear that what is important to children and young people is not always the focus of Children's Social Care. But it should be. To be child-led it is important that any measure of looked after children and care leavers' well-being focuses on the issues that are important to them, and is not just developed by adults. There needs to be a shift in focus – away from adult priorities and assessments of service delivery towards valuing children's voice and expertise on how they feel their lives are going. Office for Statistics Regulation work on visibility, vulnerability and voice stressed the need to involve children and young people in the development of statistics for and about them, as well as making sure that children and young people have a voice around how their data are used.[67]

When developing policy and practice in the care system, the key question should be - will children in care and care leavers feel that their lives got better as a result? The development of any outcomes Framework and Dashboard must, as a prerequisite, be informed by what those who receive the support say is significant to them/their well-being not what professionals think is important or what is most easily measured.

Once we know more about what is important to children (and families) who are supported by Children's Social Care then these are the issues that should be the focus for the local authority, aligned services and national Government Framework and Dashboard. Doing so would support learning about (1) understand how children are currently doing and (2) create opportunities to use their insights to ensure service delivery is focused on children's voice and views about their lives.

The Bright Spots Programme has over the last 10 years worked with children in care and care leavers to explore what makes their lives good. The Bright Spots indicators reflect the

[64] Lundy reminds us that the 'mundane matters' https://childfriendlygovernance.org/blog/why-the-mundane-matters

[65] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/bright-spots-programme/bright-spots-indicators-your-life-your-care/

[66] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/bright-spots-programme/bright-spots-indicators/

[67] https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/CYP-visual-report-V3.pdf

things that children and young people felt made their lives good and embedding these themes in any outcomes Framework will help put children and young people's voices at the heart of the Children's Social Care system. However, as detailed earlier the adoption of any national measures of well-being, must be closely tied to local authorities' quality assurance and improvement processes to ensure that they are meaningful and effectively used.

NB: This insight paper focuses only on the voice of children in care and care leavers – further work and similar careful exploration is needed regarding other groups of children and families who use social care such as children in need, in order to understand their lives, priorities and experiences and to co-create well-being measures for other groups. This would ensure that any indicators used are most relevant to those children. We know even across children in care there are differences in relation to what is reported as important to well-being e.g. those in kinship foster care reported worries over household overcrowding and worries about household income which didn't tend to feature in the experiences of children in other care settings.[68]
It is also worth considering how well-being measures of children in general could be used to inform the work of Children's Social Care. The Children's Society work on the Good Childhood report[69] and BeeWell[70] study in Greater Manchester could be a starting point for this.

5.3. Bright Spots Well-being Framework: Children in care and care leavers' voices about what makes a good life

For this insight paper, we have reviewed the way we present the Bright Spots indicators and created a new diagram to inform the Framework and Dashboard.

- We have **one overarching domain, five further domains** and **just under 50 indicators.**
- Some indicators are relevant to both children in care and care leavers and some are only for one group.

The overarching child/care leaver domain is **Well-being: Children and young people (CYP) report that their lives are good**[71] informed by five related domains:

1. **Home**: children and young people live in safe, suitable and settled homes;
2. **Trusting relationships**: children and young people stay connected to the people they want in their lives and have access to emotional support;
3. **Rights and being in and leaving care**: children and young people have positive relationships with workers and their rights and identity are supported;

[68] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/the-views-of-children-and-young-people-in-kinship-foster-care-on-their-well-being/
[69] https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/good-childhood
[70] https://gmbeewell.org/research/survey/
[71] ONS work with wider general child population on what makes a good life https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/childrenswellbeingindicatorreviewuk2020/2020-09-02#:~:text=Broad%20areas%20covered%20by%20the,finance%3B%20and%20education%20and%20skills.

4. **Opportunities:** children and young people have positive opportunities in and outside of school / college;
5. **Feelings**: children and young people report optimism about the future and their self.

The Bright Spots survey questions (indicators) for both children in care and care leavers have been mapped across the domains. In addition, the proposed Dashboard indicators have been added along with examples of *possible* supplementary local sources of data (*in italics)* to provide ideas of how other evidence could be included at the local authority level. In theory, each local authority could create their own local Dashboard with a mix of national indicators, and locally identified and sourced information[72].

[72] NB: further work could map what opportunities there are to compare to general population data https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/childrenswellbeingindicatorreviewuk2020/2020-09-02#:~:text=Broad%20areas%20covered%20by%20the,finance%3B%20and%20education%20and%20skills.

Capturing young voices - Bright Spots Well-being Framework:

Children in care and care leavers' voices about what makes a good life

(Coram Voice & Rees Centre, University of Oxford, September, 2023)

Trusting Relationships		
What matters to children	Child in care voice	Care leaver voice
See mum and dad as often as want	Age 8-17	
See brother(s) / sister(s) as often as want	Age 8-17	
Trust adults you live with	Age 4-17	
Have really good friend	All age	
Have pet	Age 8-17	
Have trusted person in your life	All age	
People to provide emotional support		
Get support with worries	Age 8-17	
Talk to adults live with about things that are important	Age 11-17	
Adults you live with notice feelings	Age 8-17	
Have someone who listens, encourages and believes in you		
Not lonely		

Rights and Being in and leaving care		
What matters to children	Child in care voice	Care leaver voice
Know social worker/ leaving care worker	All Age	
Trust social worker/ leaving care worker	All age	
Easy to contact social worker/ leaving care worker	Age 8-17	
Stability of social worker/ leaving care worker	Age 11-17	
Know can speak to social worker alone	Age 8-17	
Feel involved in decision social worker makes/ pathway planning	Age 8-17	
Not made to feel different	Age 11-17	
Reason for care fully explained	All age	

Good life / well-being		
What matters to children	Child in care voice	Care leaver voice
Satisfied with life as a whole	Age 11-17	
Happy yesterday	Age 11-17	
Things do in life are worthwhile	Age 11-17	
Anxious yesterday		

Home		
What matters to children	Child in care voice	Care leaver voice
Feel safe where you live	All age	
Feel safe in your neighbourhood		
Where you live right for you		
Like bedroom	Age 11-17	
Feel settled where you live	All age	
Stability where you live	Age 11-17	

Opportunities		
What matters to children	Child in care voice	Care leaver voice
Like school	All age	
Studying, working or training		
Adults interested in education	Age 11-17	
Supported and not afraid of bullying at school	Age 11-17	
Access to internet	Age 11-17	
Coping financially		
Chance to practice life skills	Age 11-17	
Do similar things to friend	Age 11-17	
Have fun / do hobbies	All age	
Access to nature	Age 11-17	

Feelings		
What matters to children	Child in care voice	Care leaver voice
Have goals and plans for the future	Age 11-17	
Life is getting better	Age 8-17	
Positive about future	Age 8-17	
No stress		
No worries about feelings/ behaviour	Age 8-17	
Positive feelings: proud, optimistic, full of energy		
Not angry or afraid		
Happy with how you look	Age 8-17	

5.4. Capturing young voices - Bright Spots Well-being Framework: Children in care and care leavers' voices about what makes a good life

5.4.1. Having a good life (well-being)

Good life / well-being		
What matters to children	**Child in care voice**	**Care leaver voice**
Satisfied with life as a whole	Age 11-17	
Happy yesterday	Age 11-17	
Things do in life are worthwhile	Age 11-17	
Anxious yesterday		

Good life / Well-being					
Domain	**Outcome**	**Indicator**	**Source**	**Voice or admin data**	**Update**
Good life/well-being	CYP report positive well-being	% of children in care aged 4-17 happy yesterday	Bright Spots: Your life, your care	Voice	Biennial
		% of care leavers happy yesterday	Bright Spots: Your life beyond care	Voice	Biennial
		% of children in care 11-17 satisfied with life as whole	Bright Spots: Your life, your care	Voice	Biennial
		% of care leavers satisfied with life as whole	Bright Spots: Your life beyond care	Voice	Biennial
		% children in care 11-17 report the things they do in life are worthwhile	Bright Spots: Your life, your care	Voice	Biennial
		% care leavers report the things they do in life are worthwhile	Bright Spots: Your life beyond care	Voice	Biennial
		% care leavers report low levels anxiety yesterday	Bright Spots: Your life beyond care	Voice	Biennial

5.4.2. Home: children and young people live in safe, suitable and settled homes;

Home		
What matters to children	**Child in care voice**	**Care leaver voice**
Feel safe where you life	All age	
Feel safe in your neighbourhood		
Where you live right for you		
Like bedroom	Age 11-17	
Feel settled where you live	All age	
Stability where live	Age 11-17	

Home: CYP live in safe, suitable and settled homes					
Domain	**Outcome**	**Indicator**	**Source**	**Voice or admin data**	**Update**
Home: CYP in safe, suitable and settled homes	CYP feel safe where they live	% of children in care aged 4-17 who feel safe where they live	Bright Spots: Your life, your care	Voice	Biennial
		% of care leavers who feel safe where they life	Bright Spots: Your life beyond care	Voice	Biennial
		% of care leavers who feel safe in their neighbourhood	Bright Spots: Your life beyond care	Voice	Biennial
		e.g. Bright Spots question incorporated into practice – child feels safe where they live	*IRO / care /pathway plan review*	*Voice*	*Quarterly*
		e.g. Qualitative work by children in care to explore feeling safe	*Children in care 'deep dive' report*	*Voice*	*Annual*
		% children aged 4-17 who like bedroom	Bright Spots: Your Life, Your Care	Voice	Biennial
		e.g. Bright Spots question incorporated into practice – child likes bedroom	*SW/IRO: care plan review*	*Voice*	*Quarterly*

	CYP live in suitable accommodation	% care leavers who feel where they live is right for them	Bright Spots: Your Life Beyond Care	Voice	Biennial
		e.g. Bright Spots question incorporated into practice – care leaver agree where live right for them	*PA: Pathway plan review*	*Voice*	*Biannual*
		% care leavers in unsuitable accommodation	DfE SSDA903 return / Dashboard proposed indicator	Admin	Annual / tbc
		% children in care living in foster care	Dashboard proposed indicator	Admin	tbc
		% children in care living in residential care	Dashboard proposed indicator	Admin	tbc
		% children in care placed more than 20 miles from home	Dashboard proposed indicator / DfE data	Admin	Annual
		% children in care placed outside of local authority	DfE data	Admin	Annual
		e.g. Young inspectors report – indicators determined locally	*Young inspectors work*	*Voice*	*tbc*
	CYP experience stability where they live	% children aged 4-17 who feel settled where they live	Bright Spots: Your life, your care	Voice	Biennial
		% care leavers who report feel settled where they live	Bright Spots: Your life beyond care	Voice	Biennial
		Number of placements child aged 11-17 report had in past year	Bright Spots: Your life, your care	Voice	Biennial
		e.g. % of children with 3 or more placements during the year	*DfE SSDA903/ Dashboard proposed indicator*	*Admin*	*Annual / tbc*[73]
		e.g. % CLA in long-term stable placements (>2 years)	*DfE SSDA903*	*Admin*	*Annual / tbc*[74]
		e.g. % of CLs ages 19-25 who stayed with foster carers	*DfE SSDA903*	*Admin*	*Annual*

[73] Data could be collected more frequently e.g. monthly at local level

[74] Data could be collected more frequently e.g. monthly at local level

5.4.3. Trusting relationships: children and young people stay connected to the people they want in their lives and have access to emotional support

Trusting Relationships		
What matters to children	**Child in care voice**	**Care leaver voice**
See mum and dad as often as want	Age 8-17	
See brother(s) / sister(s) as often as want	Age 8-17	
Trust adults you live with	Age 4-17	
Have really good friend	All age	
Have pet	Age 8-17	
Have trusted person in your life	All age	
People to provide emotional support		
Get support with worries	Age 8-17	
Talk to adults live with about things that are important	Age 11-17	
Adults you live with notice feelings	Age 8-17	
Have someone who listens, encourages and believes in you		
Not lonely		

Trusting relationships: CYP stay connected to the people they want in their lives and have access to emotional support					
Domain	**Outcome**	**Indicator**	**Source**	**Voice or admin data**	**Update**
	CYP feel satisfied with how often see family	% of children in care aged 8-17 who are satisfied with how often see mum	Bright Spots: Your life, your care	Voice	Biennial
		% of children in care aged 8-17 who are satisfied with how often see dad	Bright Spots: Your life, your care	Voice	Biennial
		% of children in care aged 8-17 who are satisfied with how often see brother(s) / sister(s)	Bright Spots: Your life, your care	Voice	Biennial

Trusting Relationships		*e.g. Bright Spots question incorporated into practice – child satisfied with how often they see family member(s)*	*IRO / care /pathway plan review*	*Voice*	*Quarterly*
		e.g. Young inspector work looking at family time centres	*Children in care 'deep dive' report*	*Voice*	*Annual*
	CYP feel connected to important people in their lives	% children aged 4-17 who have a really good friend	Bright Spots: Your Life, Your Care / Dashboard proposal	Voice	Biennial
		% care leavers who have a really good friend	Bright Spots: Your Life Beyond Care / Dashboard proposal	Voice	Biennial
		% children age 8-17 who have a pet	Bright Spots: Your Life, Your Care	Voice	Biennial
		% care leavers who have a pet	Bright Spots: Your Life Beyond Care	Voice	Biennial
		% children in care aged 4-17 who have a trusted adult	Bright Spots: Your Life, Your Care / Dashboard proposal	Voice	Biennial
		% care leavers who have a trusted person	Bright Spots: Your Life Beyond Care / Dashboard proposal	Voice	Biennial
		% children in care age 4-17who trust adult they live with	Bright Spots: Your Life, Your Care	Voice	Biennial
		% care leavers who report hardly ever/never feel lonely	Bright Spots: Your Life Beyond Care	Voice	Biennial
	CYP have people who provide emotional support /	% care leavers who have at least one type of person available for emotional support	Bright Spots: Your Life Beyond Care	Voice	Biennial
		% children in care age 8-17 who report worries who feel they get support	Bright Spots: Your Life, Your Care	Voice	Biennial
		% children in care age 11-17 who talk to adults live with about things that are important	Bright Spots: Your Life, Your Care	Voice	Biennial

	emotional support network	% children in care age 8-17 who feel adults live with notice feelings	Bright Spots: Your Life, Your Care	Voice	Biennial
		% care leavers who have someone who listens, encourages and believes in them	Bright Spots: Your Life Beyond Care	Voice	Biennial
		e.g. % of CLA with a missing incident during the year	*Quality Assurance*	*Admin*	*Quarterly*

5.4.4. Rights and being in and leaving care: children and young people have positive relationships with workers and their rights and identity are supported

Rights and Being in and leaving care		
What matters to children	**Child in care voice**	**Care leaver voice**
Know social worker / leaving care worker	All age	
Trust social worker / leaving care worker	All age	
Easy to contact social worker / leaving care worker	Age 8-17	
Stability of social worker / leaving care worker	Age 11-17	
Know can speak to social worker alone	Age 8-17	
Feel involved in decision social worker makes / pathway planning	Age 8-17	
Not made to feel different	Age 11-17	
Reason for care fully explained	All age	

Rights and Being in and leaving care: positive relationships with workers and rights upheld / support with identity					
Domain	**Outcome**	**Indicator**	**Source**	**Child Voice**	**Update**
		% children in care age 4-17 who know social worker	Bright Spots: Your life, your care	Voice	Biennial
		% care leaver who know leaving care worker	Bright Spots: Your life Beyond care	Voice	Biennial

Rights and Being in care	CYP report positive relationships with workers	% children in care age 4-17 who trust social worker	Bright Spots: Your life, your care	Voice	Biennial
		% care leavers who trust leaving care worker	Bright Spots: Your life Beyond care	Voice	Biennial
		% children in care age 4-17 who find easy to contact social worker	Bright Spots: Your life, your care	Voice	Biennial
		% care leavers who find easy to contact leaving care worker	Bright Spots: Your life Beyond care	Voice	Biennial
		% children in care 11-17 who report 2 or more workers in last year	Bright Spots: Your life, your care	Voice	Biennial
		% care leavers who report 2 or more workers in last year	Bright Spots: Your life Beyond care	Voice	Biennial
		% children in care age 8-17 who know can speak to social worker alone	Bright Spots: Your life, your care	Voice	Biennial
	CYP involved in decision-making	% children aged 8-17 who feel involved in decisions social worker make	Bright Spots: Your Life, Your Care	Voice	Biennial
		% care leavers who feel involved in pathway planning	Bright Spots: Your Life Beyond Care	Voice	Biennial
		e.g. number of children attending care review	*Quality Assurance*	Admin	*Quarterly*
	CYP supported with identity and understanding of personal history	% children in care 4-17 who adult given them full understanding of why in care	Bright Spots: Your Life, Your Care	Voice	Biennial
		% care leavers who feel had full explanation why in care	Bright Spots: Your Life Beyond Care	Voice	Biennial
		% children in care age 11-17 who report adults do things that make them feel embarrassed about being in care	Bright Spots: Your Life, Your Care	Voice	Biennial
		e.g. Evidence of ongoing life story / identity work across children's services	*Local authority audit work*	*Admin*	*Quarterly*

		e.g. % case files with evidence of child's diversity, inclusion and cultural needs being considered and met in placement	*Local authority audit work*	*Admin*	*Yearly*

5.4.5. Opportunities: children and young people have positive opportunities in and outside of school / college

Opportunities		
What matters to children	**Child in care voice**	**Care leaver voice**
Like school	All age	
Studying, working or training		
Adults interested in education	Age 11-17	
Supported and not afraid of bullying at school	Age 11-17	
Access to internet	Age 11-17	
Coping financially		
Chance to practice life skills	Age 11-17	
Do similar things to friend	Age 11-17	
Have fun / do hobbies	All age	
Access to nature	Age 11-17	

Opportunities: CYP have positive opportunities in and outside of school / college					
Domain	**Outcome**	**Indicator**	**Source**	**Direct voice from child**	**Update**
		% of children in care aged 8-17 who report they like school (average)	Bright Spots: Your life, your care	Voice	Biennial
		% of children in care 8-17 who feel adults take an interest in their learning	Bright Spots: Your life your care	Voice	Biennial

	CYP like & are supported at school	% of children in care 8-17 who are not afraid of going to school because of bullying	Bright Spots: Your life your care	Voice	Biennial
		e.g. Bright Spots question incorporated into practice – child likes school	*IRO: care plan review*	*Voice*	*Quarterly*
		e.g. % children in care who report attending community groups or doing music / art outside of school	*Virtual school*	*Admin*	*Annual (if available locally)*
		e.g. Average % children in care who report participating in sport or dance outside of school	*Virtual school*	*Admin*	*Annual (if available locally)*
		e.g. Number of children in care with at least one suspension	*Virtual School*	*Admin*	*Termly (if available locally)*
	CYP engaged in education / employment	% care leavers report they are studying, in work or training	Bright Spots: Your Life Beyond Care	Voice	Biennial
		e.g. % activity of care leavers (age up to 25) including % care leavers in Higher Education	*DfE SSDA903 return / Dashboard*	*Admin*	*Annual*
		e.g. Progress and attainment in Key stage results for children in care	*DfE SSDA903 return*	*Admin*	*Annual*
		% care leavers in apprenticeships	*Dashboard*	*Admin*	
		e.g. Number of ring fenced employment opportunities for care leavers	*Dashboard*	*Admin*	
		e.g. % care leavers accessing Princes Trust (or equivalent) EET opportunities	*Virtual School*	*Admin*	*Quarterly*
	CYP have access to internet / digitally connected	% children in care age 11-17 who can access internet where live	Bright Spots: Your life your care	Voice	Biennial
		% care leavers who have mobile phone	Bright Spots: Your Life Beyond Care	Voice	Biennial

		% care leavers who can access internet at home	Bright Spots: Your Life Beyond Care	Voice	Biennial
	CYP feel confident with life skills	% care leavers who report struggling to cope financially	Bright Spots: Your Life Beyond Care	Voice	Biennial
		e.g. % care leavers experience benefit sanctions	*DWP / JCP*	*Admin*	*Quarterly*
		% children in care report get chance to practice life skills	Bright Spots: Your life your care	Voice	Biennial
Opportunities		*e.g. % foster carers who report confidence in supporting children in care with life skills*	*Foster care annual review*	*Admin*	*Annual*
	CYP report having fun times	% children in care age 8-17 report get to do similar things to friend	Bright Spots: Your life your care	Voice	Biennial
		% children in care have fun / chance to do hobbies	Bright Spots: Your life your care	Voice	Biennial
		% care leavers report do fun things in spare time	Bright Spots: Your Life Beyond Care	Voice	Biennial
		% children in care age 8-17 have regular access to nature	Bright Spots: Your life your care	Voice	Biennial
		e.g. Number of children in care taking part in annual celebration event	*Participation team*	*Admin*	*Annual*
		e.g. Number of care leavers taking part in annual celebration event	Participation team	*Admin*	Annual
		e.g. Number of children in care completing Duke of Edinburgh Award	Participation team	*Admin*	Annual
		e.g. Number of children in care taking part in National Citizenship service	Participation team	*Admin*	Annual

5.4.6. Feelings: children and young people report optimism about the future and their self

Feelings		
What matters to children	**Child in care voice**	**Care leaver voice**
Have goals and plans for the future	Age 11-17	
Life is getting better	Age 8-17	
Positive about future	Age 8-17	
No stress		
No worries about feelings / behavior	Age 8-17	
Positive feelings: proud, optimistic, full of energy		
Not angry or afraid		
Happy with how you look	Age 8-17	

Feelings: optimistic about the future and their self					
Domain	**Outcome**	**Indicator**	**Source**	**Child Voice**	**Update**
Feel optimistic about future and self	CYP report positively about the future	% care leavers who have goals and plans for the future	Bright Spots: Your life Beyond care	Voice	Biennial
		% children in care age 8-17 who report life getting a bit or a lot better	Bright Spots: Your life, your care	Voice	Biennial
		% children in care age 11-17 who are positive about their future	Bright Spots: Your life, your care	Voice	Biennial
	CYP report positive	% care leavers who report low stress	Bright Spots: Your Life Beyond Care	Voice	Biennial
		% children in care 8-17 who don't worry often about their feelings or behaviour	Bright Spots: Your Life, Your Care	Voice	Biennial
		% care leavers who report they regularly feel proud, optimistic, full of energy	Bright Spots: Your Life Beyond Care	Voice	Biennial

	feelings about self	% care leavers who report they don't often feel angry, afraid	Bright Spots: Your Life Beyond Care	Voice	Biennial
		% children in care age 11-17 who happy with appearance	Bright Spots: Your Life, Your Care	Voice	Biennial
		% care leavers who happy with appearance	Bright Spots: Your Life Beyond Care	Voice	Biennial
		e.g. Number of children in care with 'elevated' SDQ score	Dashboard proposal	*Admin*	Annual
		e.g. Number of children in care receiving support from CAMHS	Health partner	*Admin*	Quarterly
		e.g. Number of children in care waiting for support from CAMHS	Health partner	*Admin*	Quarterly
		e.g. Number of care leavers receiving support from adult mental health services	Health partner	*Admin*	Quarterly

5.4.7. Example statements from the DRAFT Framework mapped to Bright Spots indicators

Below we have created an example of how local indicators (here the example used is Bright Spots) could be used to contribute to understanding progress towards the Framework statement.

Statement	**Bright Spots indicator Your Life, Your Care (children in care)**	**Bright Spots indicator Your Life Beyond Care (care leavers)**
Leaders prioritise making sure children in care and care leavers have, and can maintain, lifelong loving relationships with family and friends that go beyond professionals in their lives. Where these do not exist, leaders ensure services are available to identify and establish support network	- See mum and dad as often as they want - See brother(s) / sister(s) as often as they want - Have a really good friend	- Have a really good friend - Have trusted person in their lives - People to give emotional support - Degree to which feel lonely - Has person who listens, says when done well, believes in them

Leaders ensure they are confident that those providing care to children and young people, such as foster carers, residential children's home workers, semi-independent accommodation staff and health staff have the training, knowledge and skills, to provide loving and supportive care	- Know social worker - Trust social worker - Easy to contact social worker - Stability of social worker	- Know leaving care worker - Trust leaving care worker - Easy to contact leaving care worker - Stability of leaving care worker

5.5. Embedding Bright Spots well-being measures in day-to-day practice – exploratory work

Young people are most helpfully engaged by people who they trust and who they have had a chance to build up a trusting relationship with. This means that voice needs to be embedded in the everyday interactions and local frameworks and services that children and young people access. This includes their interactions with Children's Social Care professionals, partner organisations and other services that support them. As discussed in section 4.1, a very important way to hear and respond to the voice of children is through the one-to-one conversations children have with the trusted adults and workers in their life.

There needs to be space for individual voice expressed both formally (e.g. through care plan reviews or systematic surveys) and integrated informally in everyday interactions (e.g. conversations whilst driving together to an appointment or catching up over cup of tea). This could help children and young people have a voice at the personal level (see earlier figure 4) informing decisions about their individual care.

Local authorities and children should review the appropriateness and feasibility of embedding (some of the) Bright Spots indicators / what matters to children into day-to-day practice (and consider whether this information could be integrated to local Dashboard data collection). Not all of the Bright Spots indicators would be appropriate to collect via individual conversations (e.g. it would not be appropriate for social workers to ask their children if they trusted them, as this would be very likely to inhibit honesty in answering). However, there is likely to be merit in exploring whether some indicators, such as understanding whether children feel they had a really good friend or understand why they are in care, could fit well with direct practice, listening and responding to children[75].

We have seen some small-scale work in this area already, examples of local authorities embedding questions from the Bright Spots survey in day-to-day practices:

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	East Riding[76] pathway planning has a prompt for Personal Advisers to check in with young people whether they have outstanding questions in relation to why they were in care.

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	Hertfordshire adapted their Personal Education Plan to include a prompt for the virtual school to check with school staff (and the child) whether they are getting chances to show they could be trusted (an area highlighted by children in care in their Bright Spots results that could be improved).

[75] It is likely such questions are already asked by practitioners but the suggestion here is whether it is feasible or desirable that they are asked more systematically and answers recorded in local case recording systems / Dashboard

[76] https://coramvoice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Bright-Spots-insight-paper-Understanding-why-you-are-in-care_compressed-1.pdf

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	East Sussex have incorporated key Bright Spots questions (e.g. how are you coping financially? Do you have any questions about your time in care?) into their Pathway Plan to allow workers to discuss issues with their young people. The new items will be uploaded to the case management system allowing more in real-time feedback.

Exploring embedding some of the Bright Spots indicators into case management systems/ Dashboard could provide further insights e.g. the potential to analyse how children are doing over time; to investigate variations with reference to individual characteristics (e.g. gender, disability), reasons for entry to care and in-care histories; whether particular groups of young people report they are doing better or worse than others[77] etc.

[77] National Bright Spots analysis of aggregated data has shown that social care professionals should be mindful of the well-being concerns of different groups of children in care and care leavers, especially girls and those in residential care or living 'somewhere else' as well as young people who report a disability or long term health condition. Data sets need to be able to drill down into these different experiences by easily identifying different groups (such as disabled children). Professionals need to be aware of how identity can impact on well-being, and consider whether particular children and young people may require additional or adapted support https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/the-views-of-children-and-young-people-in-kinship-foster-care-on-their-well-being/ and https://coramvoice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/1883-CV-What-Makes-Life-Good-Report-final.pdf

6. How children's voices are heard and acted on: examples of impact

> *Perpetua Kirby, Research Fellow at Sussex University proposed the metaphor of a layered cake – data, information and information use form three layers, but voice should appear in every slice of the cake. For example, there should not only be voices within data – such as children's wishes and feelings within case file data, but also voices about what and how information is recorded or actioned, by say government, researchers, and practitioners[78].*

Children's Social Care impacts on the lives of children (and their families), those involved have first-hand knowledge of how policies and practices work and where change needs to be made. Children's views and experiences can bring novel insights into how to address shortcomings in the system[79]. Local authorities, their practitioners and wider policy-makers can learn much from children's views and ideas on how to improve the system.

> *The important lesson from New Belongings is that the value comes from working with young people locally to develop solutions that they feel will make the most difference to them. Not only does this identify the changes that are relevant to care leavers in their particular area, but the process itself has benefits for the young people participating.* [80]

By asking children and young people about their subjective experience of care and well-being in the areas that are important to them, and acting on what they tell you, you ensure that their voices are an integral part of service development. You are showing that you value their views and experiences and you are more likely to target service improvement where it will make a difference to children and young people.

As emphasised previously, delivering high quality services rests on having a culture that both values and amplifies children's voices and uses a range of ways to listen and respond in partnership with children and care leavers. There is growing consensus that service planning and provision must be informed by the views and experiences of those who deliver and use service[81]. Research has found that overlooking children's voices hinders the development of effective childhood policies and leads to poorer outcomes for their wellbeing – there are calls for children to be more involved in the development of policies affecting them to address this[82]. In our own research we found that the odds of having low well-being

[78] https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/children/news-views/2022/december/learning-is-a-team-sport/
[79] https://academic.oup.com/bjsw/article/53/3/1352/6978611
[80] https://coramvoice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/The-Story-of-New-Belongings-Final-report-Jan-2023.pdf
[81] https://www.education.ox.ac.uk/research/measuring-outcomes-for-childrens-social-care-services/
[82] https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/news/childrens-voices-must-be-heard-when-developing-policies-that-affect-them-says-the-british-academy/

increased 1.5 times if children felt excluded from the decisions that social workers made about their lives compared to those who felt included.[83]

Ofsted in their evaluation criteria are equally clear on the importance of children in care and care leavers being given the opportunity to influence practice and policy, in 'good' local authorities there is an expectation that:

> *The local authority consults widely with care leavers and involves them in designing services. Young people are well represented by a Children in Care Council (or similar body), which is regularly and routinely consulted about services for them and has direct access to the corporate parenting board. Young people's views lead to improvements in services[84].*

However, a report written by care experienced people found research about care experienced people informs policymaking rather than care experienced people themselves directly informing policymaking through participation.[85]

Our experience of delivering the Bright Spots Programme is that simply publishing the Bright Spots local authority findings report is not enough to secure learning and change. The same will be true for having children's voice as part of the Dashboard – this will not improve children's lives per se but using their feedback to guide and shape practice and policy is what will help to make life better for children in care and care leavers.

6.1. Supporting children and young people's involvement

Here are some of the things we have learnt from the Bright Spots Programme about **taking action to make improvements and supporting children to get involved in influencing policy, practice and service delivery:**

6.1.1. Time, support and transparent processes

Young people need **time, support and transparent processes to participate meaningfully and effectively and to influence change** – ask young people what works best for them and if (how) they would like to get involved. Young people who have been involved in influence work have written top tips and guides to support organisations based on their experiences[86] [87].

[83] Selwyn, J & Briheim-Crookall, L (2022) 10,000 *Voices: the views of children in care on their well-being*, Coram Voice and Rees Centre, University of Oxford. https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/10091/

[84] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspecting-local-authority-childrens-services-from-2018/inspecting-local-authority-childrens-services#evaluation-criteria

[85] https://chloejuliette.com/cep-ypn/#single/0

[86] https://tce.researchinpractice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Youth-voice-in-strategic-change-Booklet-FINAL.pdf

[87] https://www.our-voices.org.uk/assets/documents/Seeing-Things-From-Both-Sides-Comic-Cody-and-Soares-2023.pdf

6.1.2. Fun and skills development

Make sure what you are offering fits with what young people want – a mix of **fun**, the chance to gain **skills** from being involved and **a progression route** for those interested in getting more involved can be important things to consider.[88]

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	St Helen's have been working on embedding **'Voice champions'**[89] across the service to increase the number of people in the authority 'championing' 'voice' as a priority and raising its profile.

6.1.3. Renumeration

Invest in **paid opportunities for children / young people** to get involved in change and influence work.

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	**Voice & Influence workers (V&I)**[90] – Sheffield have recruited new roles – care experienced Voice and Influence workers - these posts are salaried and there is a minimum number of hours per month agreed. The roles support the wide range of voice and influence activities e.g. supporting Scrutiny Panel, outreach work, leading on projects and V&I workers are commissioned to be consultants in other settings such as health, the Virtual School and Universities. Each post is shaped around the individual and their availability, skills and interests.

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	New Belongings **Care Experienced consultants** (CECS) – this was a paid sessional role managed by the Participation Manager. The CEC induction process involved training in facilitation skills, interview skills, group work and research skills. Time was spent considering how CECs would introduce themselves and the Programme and how (if) to share their own story[91].

6.1.4. Involve children and young people in reviewing and interpreting feedback

Involve children **and young people in reviewing and interpreting feedback from children's voice** - to enable learning any outcome indicators (as part of the Framework) should never be looked at in isolation. Whilst indicators can helpfully point leaders or services in the direction of things to explore further and respond to without further detail they do not tell us how to respond or give the full picture.

For example, if some children and young people report they do not always feel safe where they live there are many outstanding questions e.g. is this disproportionately affecting

[88] https://www.carereview.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ICR_Evidence_Framework_v2-1.pdf
[89] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/st-helens-voice-of-the-child-champions-group/
[90] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/voice-influence-worker/
[91] https://coramvoice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/The-Story-of-New-Belongings-Final-report-Jan-2023.pdf

particular groups (e.g. young people in supported accommodation or residential care); why do young people not feel safe and how do they feel they could best be supported to feel safer?

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	**Stockport**[92] undertook 'deep dive' with their care leavers to understand more about why some did not feel safe in their homes. As part of the work young people came up with the idea of piloting 'video ring door bells' as they felt this could help. The local authority responded and trialled the idea – it was a success and is now rolled out to young people moving into their own homes. The scheme costs about £100. Young people felt their voice had been listened and responded to. The work had a 'ripple effect' as partners asked more about why young people were being placed where they felt unsafe and led to investment in new purpose built accommodation for care leavers.

6.1.5. Co-design

Create space and different **types of opportunities for children to get involved in co-designing solutions** and generating ideas in respond to children's voice. Dedicated and protected time for workers to spend time with young people is important – e.g. teatime chats[93], informal catch-ups[94] or etc.

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	**Hertfordshire** offer a menu of opportunities[95] for young people to get involved to make change recognising that some young people could commit to regular sessions whilst for others less frequent or one-off opportunities worked best. Some young people were interested in lots of different themes whilst others want to influence change on specific areas particularly pertinent to their lives.

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	In **North Tyneside** Personal Advisers spoke with their young people individually to tell them about the Bright Spots survey findings and get their views and ideas for priority actions[96].

6.1.6. Joint working between young people and decision-makers

Look for opportunities for **young people and decision-makers to meet and work together.**

[92] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/ring-doorbell-scheme/
[93] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/oldham-building-care-leavers-trust-in-their-workers/
[94] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/north-yorkshire-building-care-leavers-trust-in-leaving-care-workers/
[95] https://coramvoice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Hertfordshire-Menu-of-opportunities.pdf
[96] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/pas-gathering-young-peoples-priorities/

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	**Future First champions**[97] - Wandsworth wanted to make sure care leavers jointly reviewed progress of their action plan (following their *Your Life Beyond Care* survey results). Four Future First Champions were elected by other care leavers - the Champions attended the monthly Care Leavers Action group[98] – a meeting chaired by the Assistant Director along with managers from across the council and partner agencies. The Champions receive the agenda, reports and updates before the meeting and are supported by a participation worker to prepare their responses and agree how they wanted to present their views. They are paid at the London Living Wage and their travel costs reimbursed. In their Ofsted report the importance of access to senior decision-makers was recognised: "*These groups combine a healthy mix of social activities and consideration of issues relevant to their experience in care. Their voices are heard at the corporate parenting panel, and senior managers interact positively with these groups.*"[99]

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	**Dorset task force leaders**[100] are part of the **care leavers' service delivery group**[101] - care experienced young people (taskforce leaders) meet with managers from a range of services to work together. When the Task force leaders met with the council's Chief Executive and Director of Children's (DCS) service they expressed their concerns about drift and delay in implementing the plans. To address this the DCS set up the 'Care Leavers Service Delivery Group' which is chaired by an elected member with a responsibility for children services and is attended by senior managers from a range of services including health and housing.

6.1.7. Scrutiny and accountability

Create **accountability structures that involve children and young people.**

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	**Sheffield** - young people have been supported to form a **'reverse scrutiny panel**[102]**'**. Quarterly meetings are held where managers update young people on progress. Managers must submit progress reports one week in advance of the panel and young people come together to discuss and prepare for the panel. This gives young people time to come up with questions and feedback on things they feel are on track as well as areas where managers need to do better.

[97] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/future-first-champions/
[98] https://coramvoice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/ANV-Wandsworth-CLICK-Influencing-service-developments.pdf
[99] https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50204406
[100] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/task-force-leaders/
[101] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/care-leavers-service-delivery-group/
[102] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/sheffield-young-peoples-scrutiny-panel/

6.2. Sharing learning – examples of youth voice in practice

Acting on children's voice can lead to all sort of positive developments in local authorities. However, we do not always hear about this work – it is rare for organisations to routinely publish information about the outcomes or impact of their engagement work with children such as whether it leads to changes in policy or practice[103]. The Bright Spots Resource Bank[104] showcases some of the ways different local authorities have adapted their policies and practices after taking part in the Programme[105]. Many initiatives actively work alongside children and young people to develop solutions not just identify problems.

Here are some examples of how actively listening and responding to what children in care and care leavers say matters has influenced Children's Social Care service development and practice:

1. Children's Voice influencing policy change
2. Children's Voice incorporated to strategic plans and policies
3. Children's Voice raising greater awareness of issues that are important to children and gaps in service provision
4. Children's Voice influencing practice change
5. Children's Voice leading to creation of new resources for practitioners / services
6. Children's Voice incorporated into Quality Assurance of services

6.2.1. Children's Voice influencing policy change

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	Based on listening to the lived experiences of others, members of **York** children in care council[106] felt the housing service did not fully understand their corporate parenting responsibilities. To address this, a new housing protocol, informed by young people, has been introduced – it clearly emphasises the corporate parenting duties of housing colleagues. To make sure the work is embedded in practice, young people have developed training on corporate parenting, which they have delivered to staff.

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	**Isle of Wight**[107] have involved care leavers in commissioning their own accommodation with a focus on feeling safe; young people wrote questions to include in the tender application; they co-hosted the applicant information session and helped with scoring applications.

[103] https://assets.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wpuploads/2017/08/CCO_NCB_RIP_CYP-voices-review.pdf
[104] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/
[105] NB: examples given in this insight paper are taken from Bright Spots Programme and wider Coram Voice work but there are many other examples of care experienced young people influencing change e.g. Barnardos Triangles; Young people benchmarking forum etc.
[106] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/influencing-local-housing-policy/
[107] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/care-leavers-commissioning-new-supported-living-accommodation/

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	In response to Bright Spots feedback that children did not like when reviews happened and wanted more say in who attended and how they were run **North Somerset**[108] have developed more child-led review processes. Independent reviewing officers have reported an increase in the number of children and young people wanting to chair their review meetings and attending. If children do not want to attend a higher number are now asking to speak with their IRO outside the meeting to express their views.

6.2.2. Children's Voice incorporated to strategic plans and policies

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	**Hull**'s[109] new Corporate parenting strategy (2022-2024) has been structured using the Bright Spots well-being domains and is based on Hull's Bright Spots findings which told Hull what they need to focus on to improve children's lives and experiences. The strategy describes what Hull are doing as a result of the feedback and what they plan to do next.

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	The new corporate parenting plan in **Hertfordshire**[110] has been simplified and made 'friendlier, kinder and more readable'. The content and outcomes to be measured are informed by their Bright Spots findings. The plan, named by young people is called: 'Our Exciting Life Changing Plan'.

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	Our Promise' is a pledge to children in care in **Cumbria**[111] – it is a list of promises made by the council. The Children in Care council redesigned 'Our Promise' so that it is the best it can be – to make sure everyone knows what children in care want and need. They made sure the focus was on what children said mattered to them and what they want from their social workers and carers. A series of posters have been produced to promote the work. It has also been incorporated into staff training.

[108] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/north-somerset-child-led-reviews/
[109] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/childrens-voice-shaping-policy-and-practice/
[110] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/our-exciting-life-changing-plan/
[111] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/redesigning-our-promise-to-children-in-care/

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	The 'Proud to be Me' group was established in **Essex**[112] in response to the global movement Black Lives Matter movement as well as in response to local issues raised by the children in care council around ethnically diverse children not being supported with their hair and skincare. The group is for young people to support each other – they look at identity, racism, cultural differences and meet with different professionals such as the lead for anti-racist practice. They have supported the development of a 'thinking tool for professionals' on Race, Ethnicity, Religious Beliefs & Culture. They have also worked together to explore culture and identity, and developed "Please Do, Please Don't" guidelines; these are included in Essex County Council's Co-Parenting Strategy 2022 to 2027.

6.2.3. Children's Voice raising greater awareness of issues that are important to children and gaps in service provision

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	**Cambridgeshire and Peterborough's**[113] children in Care council decided to focus on the topic of mental health – over the period of one year they met services, shared experiences, attended events and deepened their understanding of this issue – they used all their work and personal insights to create a film for teenagers to try to destigmatise mental health and signpost to support. The group are making a difference both nationally and locally. They have worked alongside other youth organisations to campaign and raise awareness e.g. attending a panel discussion with politicians. They are also involved in developing the Children and Young People's Mental Health Strategy for Cambridgeshire & Peterborough advising on what they think it needs to focus on.

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	**Oldham**[114]**,** following their Bright Spots survey results, focused attention on supporting care-experienced parents whose children did not live with them. An 8-week programme was developed: the sessions worked on building self-esteem and focused on reaction to grief and loss – building peer support was key. The group was 'closed' and provided a safe space to share feelings and hopes for the future.

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	**Isle of Wight**[115] were concerned that some children were not spending time outside in natural environments (a finding in their Bright Spots report), so at low cost, an allotment project was established that is accessible for those with a disability and can be a hub for other activities too.

[112] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/exploring-identity/
[113] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/tackling-the-stigma-around-mental-health/
[114] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/support-group-for-care-experienced-parents/ and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_kAtAxvOnV4
[115] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/isle-of-wight-an-accessible-allotment-to-improve-mental-health/

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	**East Riding**[116] got together a group of care leavers to discuss the survey findings. Young people said they wanted more group based activities (in response to findings about loneliness and having fun) and a football team was set up. Dance workshop have also been started to help support children's self-esteem.

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	**Sheffield**[117] ran a challenge ('Reality cheque') for staff and councillors to live on the average income of a care leaver for the week. This helped to raise awareness of the financial challenges that care leavers face, an area raised by Bright Spots findings.

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	Body image was an area that the children in care council in **Sheffield**[118] chose to focus on after their Bright Spots findings. They organized a fashion show designed to encourage children in care to 'love themselves' for who they are.

6.2.4. Children's Voice influencing practice change

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	**North Yorkshire**'s[119] children have produced a film for practitioners focusing on stigmatising language and encouraging everyone who works with them to be mindful of the words they use.

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	**Hertfordshire**[120] worked alongside their young people to co-produce practice standards for Personal Advisers in response to feedback that some care leavers were uncertain about the level of support they could receive. The care leaver forum co-produced standards that set out the minimum levels of support a care leaver could expect to receive up to the age of 21. The standards will be adjusted to meet individual needs and cover: contact with workers; support at meetings; moving into own flat and support through difficult times.

[116] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/east-riding-setting-up-a-five-aside-football-team-to-combat-loneliness/ and https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/east-riding-dance-workshop-to-build-self-esteem/
[117] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/sheffield-reality-cheque/
[118] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/sheffield-fashion-show-to-promote-positive-body-image/
[119] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/tackling-the-language-of-care-training-video/
[120] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/co-produced-practice-standards/

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	Following findings on stigma related to being in care highlighted in the Bright Spots survey findings, the **West Sussex**[121] Children in Care Council explored this issue through 'Treat me the same' workshops, which particularly focused on children being taken out of class to attend meetings and reviews. Workshops involved several stakeholders including the virtual school and the corporate parenting panel. A number of changes came out of the workshops: e.g. commitments from different services to hold meetings out of school time. The Children in Care Council also created videos for schools, professionals and young people in care to highlight the need to treat young people in care in the same way as you would treat those not in care. These videos have been shared on the Tools for Schools website as resources for teachers.

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	**Hull**[122] have worked alongside their children in care council to develop a powerful podcast of views and experiences to share how it can feel when you have a change of worker and you don't know that this is happening. The podcast is now part of every new social workers' induction. Hull have incorporated change of worker into their monthly audit processes to check whether practice is changing and improving in this area. The new practice standards in Hull (linked to the Bright Spots well-being domains) are clear about the expectations of what should happen when there is a change of social worker. Posters have been created to tell everyone about the changes in relation to fully informing children about change of worker – they focus on 'you said' and 'we will do' to make sure children are always told the reason for a change of worker and reassured that this change is never their fault.

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	The **Sheffield**[123] Care leavers Union (SCLU) designed the 'fridge plan' in response to feedback from the Bright Spots survey and evidence from audits that some young people did not understand what was happening in their lives, didn't have a good understanding of their care journey and weren't sure about plans for the future. The new 'fridge plan' format designed with young people should mean everyone has a copy of their plan in a format they understand with no jargon.

[121] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/west-sussex-treat-me-the-same/
[122] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/managing-changes-of-social-worker/
[123] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/sheffield-fridge-plan/

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	Changes to the care plan were driven by Bright Spots findings that some children did not understand why they were in care and did not know their social worker. **Hampshire**[124] simplified the care plan templates – the new plan, My Life, My Way, is designed to be completed with the child. The document is very simple. Social workers are encouraged to add a picture of the child to the document.

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	**Southampton's**[125] Bright Spots survey results showed that some children did not feel that an adult had explained to them why they were looked after. In response, Southampton launched an all-service training package called 'Finding the right words'. The session's aim was to help provide a reflective workshop space for workers to try out and work together on ways to communicate difficult experiences to help explain to children why they are in care. As part of the work, a video has been made in partnership with a care leaver who shares the impact of not having a solid explanation of when he came into care and how he created his own narrative to manage this. The sessions are now a part of the core training offer.

6.2.5. Children's Voice leading to creation of new resources for practitioners and services

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	**Cambridgeshire and Peterborough**'s[126] young people have created films about their ideal social worker and foster carer. The films are now part of recruitment, training and inductions and have been shared with professionals working with children in meetings and at conferences. The work ensures that young people's voice is at the centre of training for carers and professionals.

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	**Essex**[127] young people have led the creation of picture books for young children to help them understand more about coming into care. At the end of the story there is some reflection / prompt questions for foster carers to discuss with children to find out more about how they are feeling.

[124] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/hampshire-child-centred-care-plans/
[125] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/southampton-finding-the-right-words/
[126] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/our-ideal-foster-carer-and-our-ideal-worker-films/
[127] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/picture-books-for-children-in-care/

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	Following their Bright Spots findings **St Helens**[128] were concerned that not all children (especially younger ones) knew who their social worker was. They developed one-page profiles of social workers and introductions cards to give out to children, which have their picture and contact details on.

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	Walking in Our Shoes is a young person-led training session – care experienced young people in **Hillingdon**[129] described the aim as to *"teach professionals to understand what it's like to be a young person in care. There are a range of activities that means that everyone has to get up, move around and participate."* Young people have also created an animation as part of the training. In the last two years, young people have trained 185 multi-agency professionals. Feedback from both professionals & young people has been very positive: *"Very fun and engaging with serious and important insights delivered by wonderful young people."*

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	**Suffolk**'s[130] 'Chat to Change' group campaign to improve the lives of children in care. Some of the things they have worked on include: coming into care packs – the group did lots of fundraising to support this and also made a film to describe more about what it is like to come into care in. They also produced, 'It's not like Tracy Beaker' film and resource pack, to be shared in schools aimed at both students and staff – they have developed a workshop to accompany the film, which will be delivered in school assemblies and lessons.

6.2.6. Children's Voice incorporated into Quality Assurance of services

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	Following feedback from how care leavers' felt about their home **Coventry**[131] in partnership with young people set up a programme of young person's inspectors to be involved inspecting accommodation and commissioning of provision.

[128] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/st-helens-getting-to-know-your-social-worker/
[129] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/walking-in-our-shoes-training-film/
[130] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/children-in-care-council-campaigning-work/
[131] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/young-inspectors/

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	**Cambridgeshire and Peterborough**[132] young inspectors have focussed their scrutiny on 'family time' services. Eight young inspectors inspected four supervised contact centres and made more than fifty recommendations to the services on things such as accessibility, furniture, resources and storage. They also recommended the centres were redecorated and paintings put up to brighten the rooms.

PRACTICE EXAMPLE	Young people in **Havering**[133] worked together and wrote a 'pledge' based on their experiences – it is a list of promises to children in care to make sure Havering is a good corporate parent. The pledge covers the areas young people thought were most important, making sure the council: Listen to you; Look after you and treat you well; Help you achieve your full potential in education; Help you to keep healthy and well. The pledge is how children and young people can hold the council to account – the content of it forms the agenda for the corporate parenting panel and young people attend and ask for progress updates / scrutinise what work has (and has not) been done.

6.3. Case studies

To further explore how youth voice is used we conducted group discussions with 10 local authority representatives from 3 LAs. They held a range of roles incl. Participation lead/manager (2), Principal Social Worker for children (2), Data / performance manager team representative (2), Quality assurance leads (2) and consultants working on data / digital within LA (2).

6.3.1. LA 1 case study

The local authority [LA] described **many different ways to hear children's voice** to understand how their children were doing. The **relationship** the child had with their social worker was recognised as pivotal.

> *"They're [young people] like, you're not going to get anything from us if we don't have the relationship to start with."*

However, other relationships also helped provide **a holistic view of the child's voice** e.g.

- social worker relationship with the carer; view/observations of family time worker and IRO (as well as aligned services such as health or education).
- Feedback was also sought from groups of children (via children in care council) and from parents too.
- The LA used Bright Spots surveys and a digital app (Mind of My Own).

[132] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/young-inspectors-improving-contact-centres/

[133] https://coramvoice.org.uk/for-professionals/bright-spots/resource-bank/pledge-to-hold-professionals-to-account/

- Advocates and independent visitors were also cited as important ways for children's voice to be heard.
- There were formal review mechanisms – the forms used were formatted in a way to encourage the author to include the child's voice.
- The LA emphasised that it was important that work to hear and respond to children's voice was **on-going not just seen as done at particular times** e.g. review.
- On-going audit work was a way to check social work was led by the voice of the child, standards emphasised this and it was a focus in supervision.

Respondents were keen to emphasise that the whole range of ways to listen and respond needed to 'cross boundaries' so children across social care (e.g. children in need) got chances to have their views heard and ways to do this were adapted and worked for different children e.g. disabled children.

> *"Our signs of safety approaches are now being checked within our data and performance to see how many children are engaging in direct working. And although we're looking at numbers there, the next level and layer of that is to look at the quality of that. Yes, those interactions have taken place - but is it that child's voice that's absolutely coming through in some of those assessments?"*

The LA were keen to celebrate practice that made a difference and regularly **captured examples where the child's voice had made a difference** and shared these with colleagues.

- Mind of My Own had resulted in positive safeguarding response.
- Bright Spots had led to tangible projects and practice change.

> *"[The] other thing that we have been trying to do is capture examples - where children's voices have made a difference to their own safety, and every month we have award ceremonies whereby positive examples and strength-based examples of work are found or we do lessons of success where something that has taken place has made a real difference to a child and young person and they can feed that in, so that the practitioners can learn from it."*

> *"Young person in care who has told us the absolute impact that Mind of my Own had because they don't always want to speak directly to a social worker, there's times where they would prefer to use the application to get the point of view across."*

Respondents described **a learning culture** with children's voice a central thread e.g.

- care experienced young people co-developed and led some training and Participation colleagues helped other teams who may feel less confident in supporting 'voice' activity.

- The LA used the **Lundy model of Participation** to further encourage relational practice.

It was recognised that **a lot of the data on children's voice was 'narrative'** (with the exception of things such as SDQ or some Signs of Safety work, which was scaled). Further work was needed to understand more about the quality of the work on children's voice undertaken and the themes arising – at present data reported mainly on the number of sessions completed and there was **nothing in the LA local data about child voice that was easily quantifiable.**

> *"How many children have done wishes and feelings with, for instance, the 3 houses? And then there would be a short analysis that was provided with anything that's a real worry that jumps out…But my view would be between Quality Assurance and the Social Work Academy…That would be our next step, which started to gather it. So, from the wishes and feelings of the children, what are the kinds of the themes and the patterns?"*

> *"We gather all the data every month and we look at it and what some of the views are and then we share the learning through our Workgroup manager meetings and our group manager or wider leadership. And if I'm honest, some of our focus initially was just getting it driven, so it was driving the numbers [using Mind of My Own app] rather than what the children were saying because we wanted everybody to start using it, whereas now we're starting to use more of the messages about how people, how the children are feeling."*

> *"There is narrative, and so we can look at the IRO feedback forms. We can look at social workers recordings, can't we? And they'll say child wanting to say this. As part of our audits, we do gather feedback from children and family. So when we do our monthly case file orders, we contact children, families and we harvest their comments Are we getting it right? Are we getting it wrong? What could we do different? But again, that's still text and it's still captured in text…it's difficult to turn text and numbers in a consistent way."*

Reflecting on child's voice and where this was situated in data recording and systems those taking part were keen to emphasise **the need for information to be contextualised** in terms of children's development stage and circumstances. Caution was urged when introducing measures to avoid any misinterpretation. Furthermore, any **additional reporting duties would create additional burden** on LAs so again proceeding with caution / consultation with LAs was urged.

> *"There's always the potential for perverse incentive or perverse outcomes, isn't it? So if you were to say as part of the dashboard, the number of complaints made by children looked after. So if you suppress complaints by children looked after and make your dashboard look better, that's not a good thing….And if children are*

making complaints about the service and you're responding to them, then that's a good thing."

The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) was seen as an additional tick box – respondents were unsure as to whether it was really bringing the authentic voice of the child. They were concerned that it labelled children, that is was not culturally or gender sensitive and did not give context.

> *"But I think people see that [SDQ] just as an additional tick box exercise ...and actually is that really bringing to fruition the voice of children. If you used it in the right way, yes, but I think practitioners, tick box exercise when it isn't important, it's a really important piece of intervention. If it's done appropriately….Imagine when you're older and you see your SDQ when somebody's ticked a box that describes you in a certain way, it's like you said, you know, it just labels them."*

One group of children whose voice risked being missed was children who enter care via remand route.

Those taking part in the case study discussion were concerned about adding even more things for children to complete – children tell the LA they are sick of filling in forms – therefore respondents wondered if there were **more creative ways** (without forms) that children could use to share how they were doing and feeling.

> *"They get so sick to death of adults coming in prior to looked after children reviews, prior to meetings that they don't feel are important for them. Some of them don't feel they're important cause they're just happy living in their foster like and basically saying we're getting sick of filling forms out."*

The local authority had committed to doing Bright Spots survey every 2 years – which means other surveys tended not to be carried out: *"the beautiful thing about Bright Spots is it stops asking children stuff all the time."*

The local authority were clear that there must be **action as a result of listening to children**.

> *"Because otherwise you're saying to children, thank you so much for the children that took the time to feed in to the Bright Spots. But what we're going to do, we're just gonna say nice one. We did it and we're not gonna do, You said we did. And we're not gonna act on any of it. Cause then the next time it comes round those children are just gonna think, well I'm not gonna do that again. Cause nothing happened with it and I suppose that's the bit where we feel we have taken a lot of local action"*

Impact examples from the LA include: revised corporate parenting strategy, voice integrated to practice standards, projects with children as well as work on delegated authority.

"[We've focused on] delegated authority on the back of Bright Spots because our children were saying we get treated differently, please stop treating us differently and that has gone so wide across our fostering service, and because our fostering service are being part of those workshops, our foster carers, our fostering social workers, our allocated social workers and then some of the stuff around how our children were feeling about friendships, being bullied and people not fully understanding why they were in care and the trauma that that's caused and the investment we've put into the training for our foster carers around trauma and so.. it's had such a huge knock on impact in terms of the way that we want to work with our children and young people."

6.3.2. LA 2 case study

The Local Authority (LA) shared their commitment to hearing and responding to children's voices. One of the central ways they did this was through **a week-long series of events** for children across social care (separate days and sessions were held for different groups of children e.g. separated migrant children; children in need etc.). There were lots of **fun activities and time for conversations** with children about their views, feelings and how they felt things were going. The week was well attended by **senior managers**. A report will be produced and used in strategic planning.

"Our Executive Director, Assistant Directors and lots of the senior management team were there and spent time with the children and young people. This year we had "The Big Conversation" – we were tasked with asking children and young people just three very simple questions and recording their responses. We get a lot of really valuable information from this."

Other ways the LA hear how their children are feeling and what they are doing include:

- having care-experienced consultants/peers who speak to others;
- on-going audit work;
- speaking with parents/carers;
- feedback sheets at review meetings (CIN/CP/LAC).

It was important to have **a menu of options for seeking children's voices**. Groups of children whose voices tended to be less heard included: 'in-betweeners' i.e. not the ones who attended engagement events and not the ones who are most dissatisfied as they tend to make their views heard but those who were more in the 'middle'.

The LA were aware of **more creative / tech enabled** ways being trialled in other Local Authorities but did not have such systems in place in their area yet. Some children use 'Whatsapp' to contact their social workers and some write to them or draw pictures, but

there is no straightforward way for this to be saved to the case management system. The LA felt they **needed to get better at utilising digital ways of communicating and recording children's voices.**

> *"Other ways than just the written word in which children and young people would like to interact and be invited to be more collaborative. Other Local Authorities have got "portals"…. to encourage children to directly input their views."*

However, respondents emphasised that ultimately what should be at the centre of practice was the **child's voice facilitated by the relationships children and young people have.**

> *"At the heart of what social workers do, part of their roles and responsibilities is making sure the voice of the child is listened to and heard. As different ways of gathering data or looking at information. Social Workers need to remember that everything we write about families is meant to be easy to be able to share with the child even after the event, this could be years and years later. We hold this very much in mind."*

Those taking part in the discussion stressed the **need to contextualise information**. For example:

> *"A team might look really good because they've got 100% visit [rate in performance data]. But if you look at an actual visit record on the system, and what information is in there, there may be nothing and it could just be ticked and copy and pasted from a previous one."*

At present data on children's voice was mainly **narrative**. There had to be space for the 'art of the social worker' – to hear **unsolicited feedback and 'natural voice'** not just feedback via events or surveys.

> *"Quantitative data we can see in a dashboard already, where I can look at live data at any time and see the % of children being seen. Capturing Qualitative data 'live' in a dashboard is far more complicated. It may be about changing how we write, for example using certain key phrases within our recordings. . Capturing that vibrancy and that joy from speaking to children…it comes down to the art of the social worker and building strong, trusting relationships with children. We need to capture both quantitative and qualitative data"*

Though dashboards did have a role to play – they could be useful starting point to ask more questions.

> *"Local Authorities use Dashboards and add to the data analysis to help understand the data and provide a narrative to it. The quantitative data helps to evoke questions. What's the reason why this has happened? Why has this increased or*

decreased? Then the data's there and it helps to navigate and provide some understanding. It helps to monitors, tracks and measures, but it also guides for quality and improvement of practice.
Feedback from the foster carers, parents, children and young people can come to us by circuitous ways, but it is taken on board.
The option to capture it all in one place there is a question around whether we even need to be doing that - it just might not even make sense.
There's not an exact science about it because ***at the heart of it this it's the human relationships"***

Respondents queried whether some things could (or should) be measured:

> *"The experience of a young person going through their life, and us trying to make it neat and tidy in recordings might not be possible."*
>
> *"The question 'what is a loving relationship? … How do we expect our children and young people to know what a loving relationship is?*
>
> *Some things we try to measure is incompatible with being measured…whilst we have [a] preoccupation with being able to measure everything that happens in social care."*

Those taking part in the discussion also issued a note of caution over introducing children's feedback as part of sessions between children and their workers.
There was a concern that if there is a new directive for all workers to ask standardised questions to their children as part of one-to-one work then there may be a drive to get the feedback done and focus on the data rather, than focus on doing something in response to what the child is saying.

> *"Conversations that we need to have with children that we work with are sometimes going to be enjoyable and other times conversations that they need to have can be really tough to hear. A social worker may have done that exceptionally well but it would be because it was tough for the child to hear, there is a likelihood they'll likely score that bit of the meeting/visit down where actually the social worker has done some exceptional work [in delivering those hard messages to the child/young person]."*

In terms of **influencing services** within the LA children previously attended corporate parenting panels but no longer did this as it was something they feedback they did not enjoy ('rubbish and boring').

The LA noted that if metrics were introduced that tried to measure whether children attended things like a Corporate parenting board would need to be careful as some may not do this as children chosen not to do it.

The LA had different examples of impact from listening and responding to children's voices e.g. "You said, We did"; information sheets designed by children for when they moved to new carers with photos of the house and details about the family.

Ultimately, any **data collected should be for the purpose of learning.**

> *"When we're talking about data, we should ban the phrase "It would be interesting…." – this could lead us to collecting data for the wrong reasons.* ***We need to be collecting data that helps us improve the way that we work with children, young people and their families."***

6.3.3. LA 3 case study

Children's voice was described as a **thread running through all the work undertaken in the local authority**; it is **tailored to each individual child** and there were a range of resources to support practitioners in gaining the voice of children. **These tools (e.g. worksheets; games** to aid discussion) are currently being reviewed and updated, the work is being coproduced with children.
In addition to work with individual children, there are opportunities for children to come together in **different groups to represent children's different experiences** (e.g. group for care experienced parents). The work is underpinned by a **new participation framework**; an important commitment is making sure **children get to hear what happens as a result of taking part and sharing their voice**. Previously the work has been mainly focused on children in care but the commitment is now to make sure work is across children's social care. Examples of '**lesser heard voices' include children in youth offending services; children from ethnically diverse backgrounds** – the onus is on the local authority to be proactive to meet with these children e.g. rather than inviting young people to events going to the places where young people are.

"*The [participation] team has now been expanded and we work with children and young people and families across the service. There's a new framework that has been implemented…what we have is a bit of an action plan over a year now…where we are working with young people around their voice, what they feel works, where they feel practice needs to develop. We [are] ensuring that we're coproducing in terms of what the young people are telling us"*

There are **limited digital tools in use** – at present workers may take photos of the direct work they do with children and these can then be uploaded to the case management system. Feedback from practitioners is that **capturing voice of child in case management system is an area of work for improvement.**
Other opportunities to hear from children include:

- Reviewing content of out of hour calls to see what sort of themes/issues arise for children/young people who contact the local authority this way.
- Practice week at set times during the year involves a lot of **Quality Assurance activity** and provides a focused opportunity to seek feedback from children (people independent of the social work team undertake this role). A report is produced for the senior management team – it details the proportion of children

who have contributed their views and the number involved in their plan – a subsequent action plan is created based on the findings.

- Some children (with the support of their Independent reviewing officer) are supported to **chair their own review.**
- **Deep dive work** is undertaken focused on cohorts of children e.g. children not in education, to understand more about their views and experiences
- Celebration or one-off events (e.g. cooking meals together) provide an opportunity for **political leaders and senior managers to meet with young people at events.**
- Young people are involved in nominating, shortlisting and judging awards for staff.
- **Bright Spots survey findings** are reviewed and inform service wide thinking about areas that need development.
- Some **forms have built in feedback** e.g. children in need minutes have section to record whether child spoken to – this information can be aggregated to look at proportion across population who are taking part.

Young people **attend corporate parenting panels**/meetings and they are supported to ask questions, to look at the outcomes and what has been achieved so far.

In terms of impact **children have led on different projects aimed at influencing practice change** e.g. children have led on work around language used in social care to encourage practitioners to be mindful of the way they write about children in records –a film and accompanying training have been produced. Children have also co-designed a pack for children when they enter care – the bags have inspirations quotes on them and are available in different social work offices so can be accessed by workers at short notice if needed.

7. Concluding thoughts

Co-production and participation is a journey. With the right commitment professionals and young people can work together to make things better. Although it is not always perfect, continually aiming to bring people together, to listen and to act on what you hear is what is important. Just because you can't do it as well as you would like to, does not mean you shouldn't do it at all[134].

Because it sits outside of [the LA] completely external to the work that we do. I think it gives a much more genuine opportunity to get young people's views really, and a better sense of the things that we should be doing more of. (Leaving Care Team Leader) [135]

[134] Professor Lundy https://childfriendlygovernance.org/blog/laura-lundy

[135] Evaluation of Bright Spots Programme https://www.education.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Evaluation-report-08.04.21.pdf

There's nothing like the children's voices. We can pretend we know, and we can speak to foster carers and we can speak to schools … but children's voices are the most important. (Service Leader)[136]

8. Recommendations

Youth Voice must be placed Centre stage in Government strategy. Our recommendations include actions for the Department for Education (DfE), Local Authorities (LAs) and other public bodies.

- **Recommendation for the DfE: Embed youth voice as a key 'Enabler' in the Children's Social Care National Framework**

Youth Voice should also be embedded in the Children's Social Care National Framework. It should be identified as a key 'Enabler' to help children's services achieve the outcomes in the Framework. The Framework should set out what would be expected of leaders and practitioners to make listening to and acting on children's views a reality.

The Department should work with sector experts to produce practice guidance to help local authorities realise this. It should be part of local authority leadership responsibilities to make sure that they have the structures, resources and tools needed to listen and respond to voice effectively.

- **Recommendation for the DfE: Make listening and responding to children a new (distinct) mission in *Stable Homes Built on Love***

To ensure youth voice is prioritised and the structures needed to listen and respond to youth voice effectively are in place in all local authorities, we recommend the introduction of a new distinct 'Mission' focused on consistently giving children and young people a voice in their own care and in the development of Children's Social Care (in addition to the missions identified to support children in care and care leavers in *Stable Homes Built on Love*)

Mission 7 – Voice

Mission 7: By 2027, all children and young people consistently report having a voice in their care, and there are structures to embed their right to be heard and enable their participation at all levels of decision making.

This should include:

- A range of opportunities for children and young people to have their voices heard at the individual, local authority and national level.
- Staff with the skills to communicate with and listen to children and young people and act on what they say or escalate issues to others who can.

[136] ibid

- Individual planning processes (such as care or pathway planning) guided by children and young people such as child friendly plans or apps, supporting them to chair their reviews, decide where and when meetings take place etc.
- Mechanisms to ensure children are routinely informed about rights and have child friendly accessible sources of information about what support they are entitled to.
- Responsive systems where all children involved with children's social care (including those in care and care leavers) are able to get hold of workers to discuss concerns and ask for help when needed and access to independent advocacy to support them to have their voices heard.
- Systems to collate and aggregate issues that young people repeatedly raise in individual case work and are proving problematic in more than one local authority.
- Fun and engaging resources to encourage children and young people to participate and share their views.
- Child friendly complaints processes when things go wrong and cannot be resolved by workers directly.
- Participation structures, such as Children in Care Councils, with opportunities for children and young people in children's social care to meet with senior leaders and share their views directly.
- Opportunities for children and young people to coproduce new projects and service developments.
- Senior leaders committed to listen to children and young people and embed coproduction and communicate how they are responding to children and young people's views in an accessible format.
- Regular scrutiny of the quality of participation with data collected on the effectiveness of participation and engagement.

- **Recommendation for LAs: Create a range of structures that provide a menu of options for children and young people to be heard**

There is no one specific activity that can embed children's voice in local authority work. All local authorities should ensure they have a range of structures and processes to listen and respond to how children in children's social care (including those in care and care leavers) feel about their lives in the areas that are important to them at both the individual level and collective level. For example, they may be captured through the day-today conversations workers have with children they support, through effective participation groups or through gathering the views of children in care through local authority wide surveys. Whatever structures are in place must enable *all* children to share their views including disabled children.

- **Recommendation for all intending to capture youth voice data: Do not collect children and young people's views unless you intend to take action on what they say**

Data on children's voice must not simply be collected to populate a Dasboard – it must be accompanied by action. It is deeply unethical to ask children and young people about their

views and experiences if you do not intend to ensure their views are heard. This does not mean that children and young people always get what they are asking for, but that their views are considered and feedback is shared on what can and cannot be done as a result.

Youth voice outcomes measures in the Dashboard should not be treated as a measure of good or bad performance – rather they should help steer staff and leaders to areas that need to be explored further and where solutions can be developed in partnership with children and young people. The important thing is to interrogate, reflect and respond to any data collected – ensuring that outcome measures are for learning rather than outcomes measures simply for reporting.

- **Recommendations for LAs, the DfE & other public bodies: Use the Lundy model of participation to assess how well they are enabling children and young people to be heard**

As part of reviewing annual plans, local authorities should appraise how Lundy's participation model is going in practice in their organisation[137]. The Lundy Model should also inform youth engagement at the national level in terms of how young people are heard by Government and other public bodies with extended corporate parenting responsibilities.

Questions for local authorities, DFE and other public bodies to ask themselves include:

Space: *providing a safe and inclusive space for children and young people to express their views.*

- *Is youth engagement prioritised and resourced?*
- *Have young people been asked for their views?*
- *How many opportunities have there been?*
- *Is the venue/online space accessible, friendly and safe?*
- *Do young people feel that they can be open and honest about how they feel (how, when and by who are young people asked to share their views)?*
- *Are the staff team trained and supported appropriately?*
- *Have young people been proactively recruited to take part from a variety of backgrounds?*

Voice*: providing information and support for children and young people to express their views.*

- *Are young people asked about things that feel relevant to them?*
- *Have young people been provided with the information they need to form a view?*
- *Do young people know their participation is voluntary?*
- *Are creative and fun activities being used to support young people to express their view on topics?*

[137] https://participationpeople.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Compressed-PP-_-Lundy-Model-Explained-2.pdf

- *Do young people have opportunities to set the agenda and define what is discussed? Is there enough time scheduled to delve into the topics?*
- *Are workshop resources accessible to young people; youth proofed; and youth friendly?*

***Audience**: making sure children and young people's views are communicated to the right people.*

- *Are appropriate decision makers involved and engaged?*
- *Is there a clear and agreed process for communicating back young people's voices and views to decision makers?*
- *Do young people know who their views are being shared with and what will happen to them afterwards?*
- *Do decision makers know how young people's views will feed into their decision-making processes?*
- *Is the person 'receiving' young people's views the person with the power to make (or influence) decisions?*

***Influence**: ensuring children and young people's views are taken seriously and acted upon wherever possible.*

- *Were young people's views considered in the decision-making process, and how is it recorded?*
- *Have young people been told about how their views have impacted a decision – and if not, why?*
- *Are there procedures in place for young people to hold decision-makers to account for their decisions?*
- *When and how will young people know or see the impact of their participation?*

- **Recommendation for the DfE: Develop youth voice indicator(s) to measure whether children and young people feel included in decisions and local authorities have structures to capture voice**

As part of work on the Government's Dashboard the DfE should work with children and local authorities to develop metric(s) to understand the way(s) children's voice is heard and acted upon in local authorities, e.g.:

(1) an indicator to understand the degree to which LA has structures in place, such as % of children engaged in participation activities over the year and

(2) an indicator around the degree to which children themselves feel included by asking children directly, such as through the anonymous Bright Spots survey the degree to which they feel involved in decisions social workers make about their life.

- **Recommendation for the DfE: Ensure any Dashboard indicators designed to reflect young voices have been developed with the children and young people whose voices they intend to capture.**

The way any outcome measures are designed is important. It is essential that ongoing consultation with children and young people is central to any Framework and Dashboard. Learning from the Bright Spots Programme is focused only on children in care and care leavers – not other groups of children in Children's Social Care. Further development work is needed to ensure outcomes in the Framework and indicators in the Dashboard incorporate these children' voices. This work needs to be funded and involve children from the start. Sector opinion[138] on data/voice of the child emphasises that work on data/voice of the child is difficult and underdeveloped. It is not an area that can addressed quickly or where there are quick wins available.

- **Recommendation for LAs: Produce an annual plan and report on progress on how they are listening and responding to young voices**

Local authorities should be required to produce an annual plan of how they will listen to and respond to children and young people's views. The plan should include detail on the changes they will make to make to ensure the structures, resources and tools are available to make sure children and young people are heard. The plan should be updated and progress reported on annually with case examples of the impact of children's voice on practice and policy. It should be produced in a format accessible to children and young people. A process to allow children and young people to scrutinize plans and progress should be included in this work.

- **Recommendation for Ofsted – Include the annual plan in inspection evidence and report progress on youth voice in Annex A and continue to scrutinise the quality of youth voice in local authorities**

Ofsted should continue to scrutinise and report on the degree to which local authorities have the structures and effective practice in place to listen and respond to children's voice and report on the evidence of children's voice leading to change. The LA indicators on voice, annual plan and report on progress on youth voice should form part of the Ofsted self-evaluation and Annex A data requirements.

- **Recommendation for the DfE: Make improving well-being, as defined by children and young people themselves should be made a key pillar for Children's Social Care**

An overarching goal of the Government's strategy for children's social care should be to make life better for children and young people in the social care system by making well-being, as defined by children themselves, a key pillar for Children's Social Care. Doing so would align with the Framework and Dashboard where the purpose of Children's Social Care is described as ensuring children and care leavers thrive. Additionally, it would align with

[138] See DDSF Project 1a sector mapping

corporate parenting principles[139] including to act in the child's best interests and promote their physical and mental health and well-being.

- **Recommendation for LAs, the DfE & other public bodies: Do not just measure children's views on services - measure how they feel about their lives (subjective well-being)**

In seeking to understand children and young people's lives and their experiences of the Children's social care system Local authorities, the Department for Education and other public bodies working with children and young people should focus on capturing children's own evaluations of their lives (subjective well-being) in the areas that matter to them, not just children's evaluation(s) of the services and support they receive. Focusing on well-being (as defined by children, not adults) offers an opportunity to appraise whether children themselves feel their lives are improving in the areas that matter to them them (which may well be different from an adult-led perspective).

The Bright Spots indicators have already been developed to capture children in care and care leavers well-being, further work is needed to adapt this framework for other groups (e.g. children in need) to ensure that what is measured reflects what is important to them.

- **Recommendation for the DfE: Review the Brights Spots Well-being Framework and potential application to the DfE Dashboard**

The Bright Spots Well-being Framework provides an overview of the domains and indicators that children in care and care leavers told us made their lives good. The Government should review the Bright Spots framework and map to the Children's Social Care Framework.

- **Recommendation for the DfE and Coram Voice: Develop a dedicated project to explore how Bright Spots indicators can be embedded in day-to-day practice**

A focus on the Bright Spots indicators could help practitioners to ensure that Children's Social Care supports children and young people's well-being and what is important to them. A dedicated project should be set up with a small number of local authorities and partners (including young people) to explore how and which Bright Spots questions could be embedded in day-to-day practice e.g. care planning and case management recording. Children and young people must be central to any project and should be involved in co-producing this work.

- **Recommendation for the DfE: Promote and develop shared learning around youth voice**

Local authorities (and other partner agencies) would benefit from opportunities to share practice on ways of seeking, recording and analysing children's views and experiences. The Framework could be an opportunity to consolidate and promote learning in this area. To support the Children's Social Care system to continue to share and apply best practice there

[139] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/683698/Applying_corporate_parenting_principles_to_looked-after_children_and_care_leavers.pdf

should be a range of opportunities for local authorities to come together to share ideas and discuss how to overcome challenges they experience. Equivalent opportunities need to be available for young people's participation groups too.

- **Recommendation for the DfE: Use the Bright Spots data already available to understand more about what matters to children and young people's lives and well-being and inform decision making**

We urge the Government (and others) to make use of the insights already gathered from the Bright Spots Programme to make sense of children in care and care leavers' lives. Coram Voice would welcome opportunities to work together to analyse and explore the Bright Spots data collated to date (24,000 voices) and in the future to understand more about what matters to children's lives and well-being.