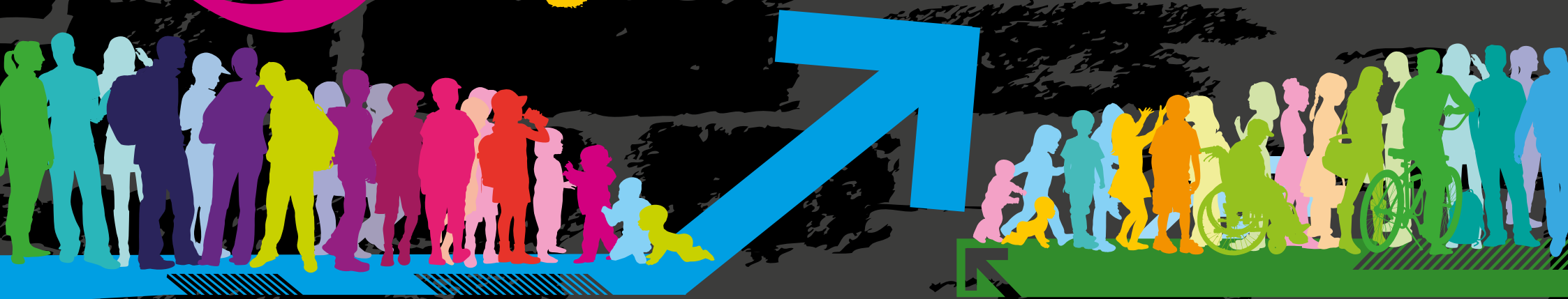




VOICE

**OF A CHILD
STRATEGY**

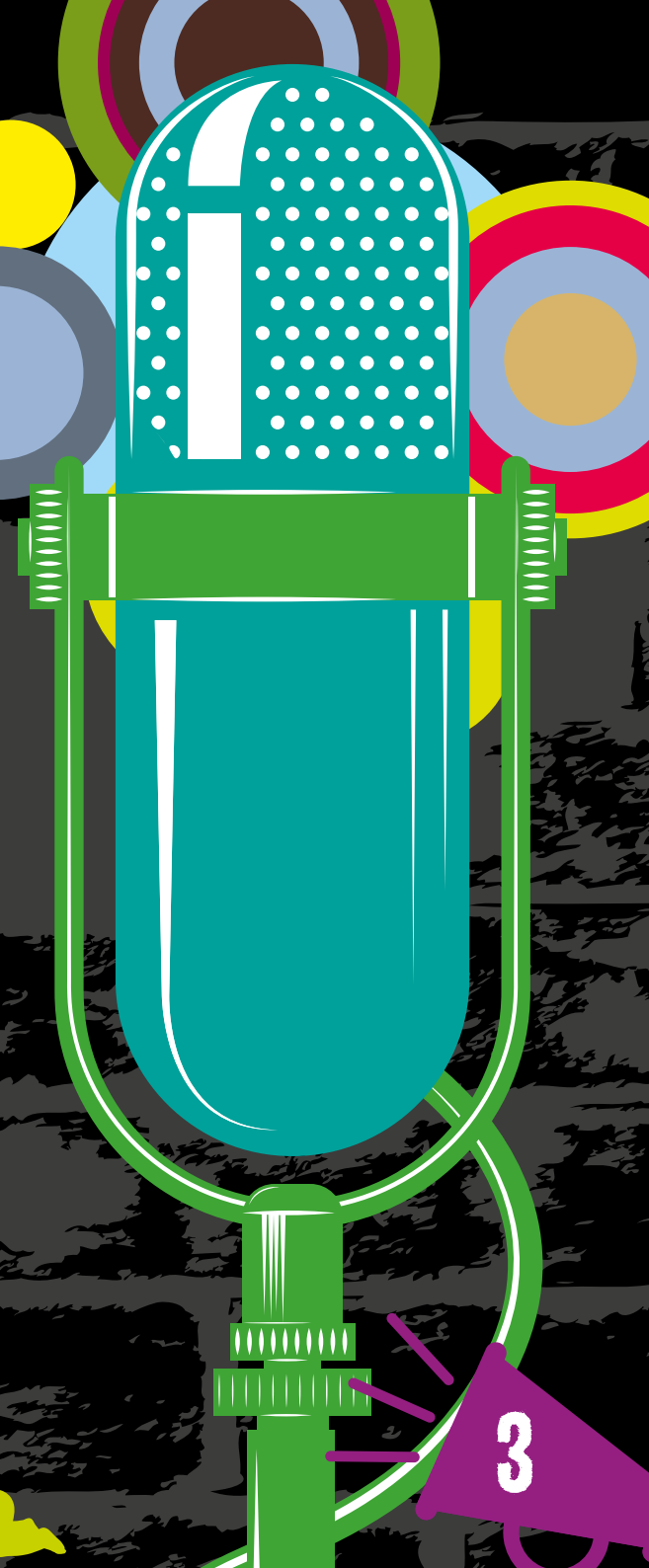




VOICE OF A CHILD STRATEGY

MISSION STATEMENT

“I AM THE EXPERT IN BEING ME
YOU ARE THE EXPERT IN YOUR FIELD
IF WE TRULY JOIN FORCES AND WORK TOGETHER AS EQUALS
I CAN BE A BETTER ME AND YOU WOULD BE ABLE TO HELP MORE YOUNG
PEOPLE, WHICH WOULD MAKE YOU A BETTER YOU.”



INTRODUCTION

Within Tameside we have for a number of years delivered participation forums that our children and young people can engage with in order to improve their lives and the local communities in which they live. This strategy outlines our vision for Voice of the Child within Tameside, its context and, crucially, what our vision and aims are and how we seek to achieve them.

International and national legislation enshrines the rights of children and young people to participate in decisions about their own lives.

Research shows supporting children and young people to make informed decisions about their own lives improves outcomes in terms of self-confidence, social skills and positive life choices. For children and young people who experience the child protection system, participation is of particular importance.

To this end this strategy and the statements of expectation within it, shows our commitment to hearing the voices of all children and young people in Tameside.

It brings together in a single approach how organisations will work together as a partnership to plan, deliver and improve the opportunities for children and young people to influence the services that matter to them.

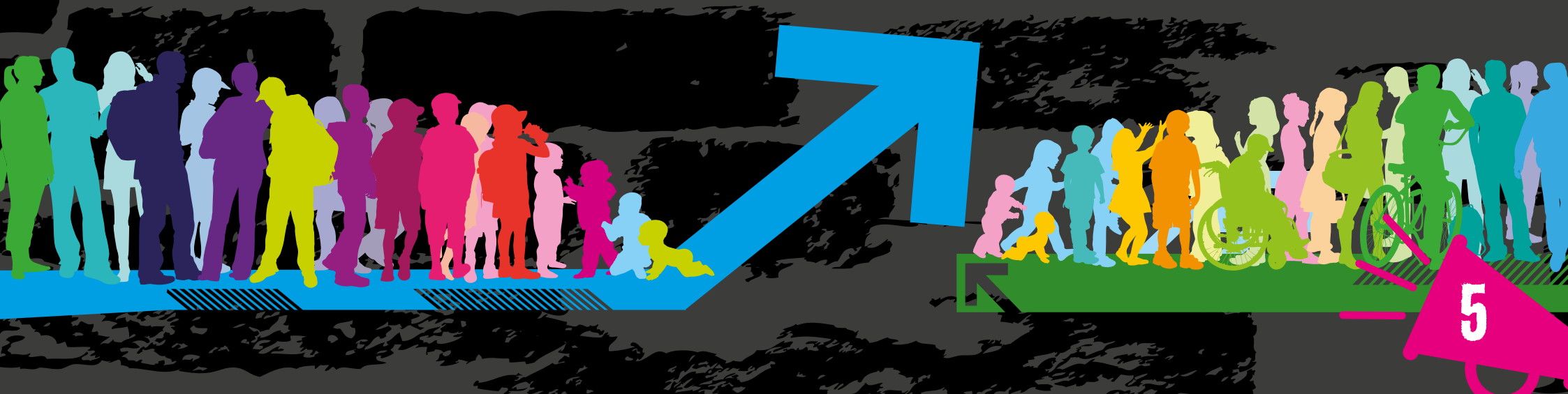
This document sets out a voice strategy that is intended for everyone in Tameside working with children and young people. This strategy is also for people working directly with children and young people as well as those who commission or manage staff, services or organisations that support children and young people, and for organisations and partnerships whose work impacts upon children and young people. It is intended that all services can access this strategy and work towards its strategic aims.

The strategy is primarily focused on improving the participation of children and young people, promoting a rights-based approach linked to United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. We also recognise that in many instances the involvement of parents and carers in participation activity is appropriate for service improvement and development.



THIS STRATEGY INTENDS TO:

- SET OUT OUR VISION AND AIMS FOR VOICE OF THE CHILD IN TAMESIDE.
- IDENTIFY THE GOOD WORK ALREADY IN PLACE.
- OUTLINE AREAS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT AND STEPS TO ACHIEVE THEM.



WHAT DO WE MEAN BY THE VOICE OF THE CHILD?

When we say the Voice of the Child, we mean talking to, listening to and engaging with what children and young people have to say about the service they receive, and using what they tell us to change and develop the way we work. This can be day-to-day, where practitioners make time to talk to children and young people individually and in an environment where they feel they can express their needs. However this can also take other forms, such as in groups or surveys, and can result in wider systemic change as well as informing care planning.

This strategy will cover three different ways of incorporating the voice of the child:

- **INDIVIDUAL LEVEL**
- **STRATEGIC LEVEL**
- **COMMUNITY LEVEL**



INDIVIDUAL:

Children and young people influence decisions made about their lives. The voice of the child on an individual level is where a child or young person is actively involved in the services that they need on a personal level. The Tameside Pledge to Looked After Children has promised to always listen to, involve and be honest with children about the plans being made about their life. This might include, for example, statutory orders like Child Protection Plans as well as other plans such as health, and personal education plans.

STRATEGIC:

Children and young people are actively involved in the wider improvement of the service. Using the Voice of the Child for wider service improvement is equally important to outcomes for looked after children and young people. This allows Children's Services to be designed around the actual need articulated by children and young people rather than the perceived needs by adults working for them. It also helps to boost perceptions of the service, and the trust that the input of children and young people will be taken seriously.



COMMUNITY:

In addition, using the Voice of the Child provides Community improvement. Firstly, Speaking up about their needs equips children to be agents of change while they are in care, and to be active in the community as adults with high aspirations for their lives.

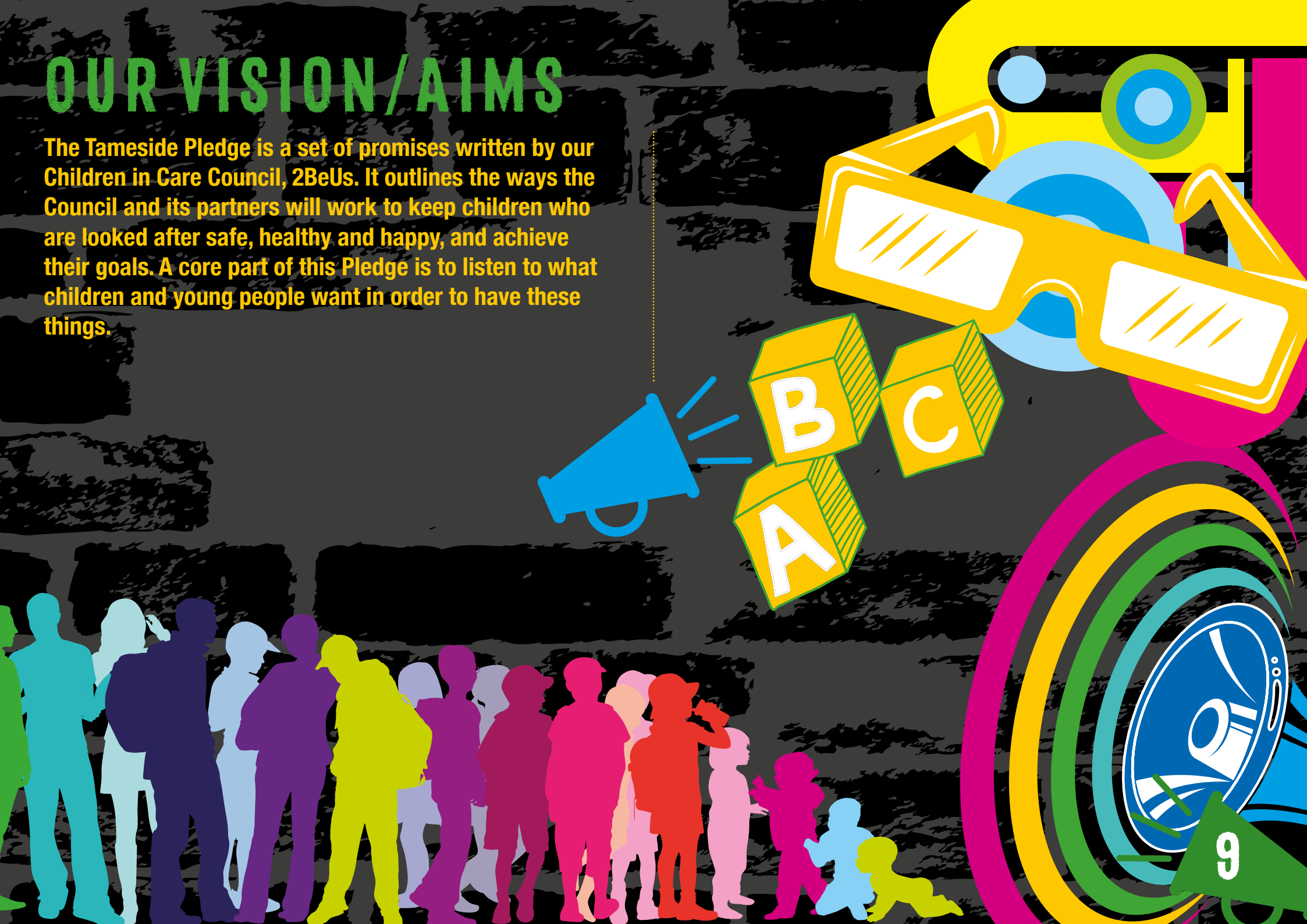
Collaboration between young people and the services they rely on (such as Children's Services, Health, Education, Police, Housing etc.) will raise the profile of the benefits of participation and increases children's trust with adults to act upon their desired outcomes.

Secondly using the Voice of the Child will raise awareness among all professionals who work with children of their right to have their voice heard. Participation should be seen as a meaningful ongoing process rather than a one-off event, and children and young people will not be dismissed as being too young to have valid opinions on the decisions made about them.



OUR VISION/AIMS

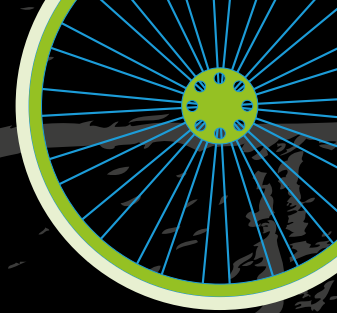
The Tameside Pledge is a set of promises written by our Children in Care Council, 2BeUs. It outlines the ways the Council and its partners will work to keep children who are looked after safe, healthy and happy, and achieve their goals. A core part of this Pledge is to listen to what children and young people want in order to have these things.



THE REFRESHED TAMESIDE PLEDGE HAS PROMISED THAT WE WILL:

- Always involve children in the decisions that will affect them
- Help children to stay in touch with people they consider to be important in their lives
- Keep children safe and help children to keep themselves safe

- Help children achieve their potential
- Help children prepare for independence and adult life
- Listen to 2BeUs, our Children in Care Council



As part of the process to refresh the pledge we worked with a wider group of children and young people to ensure a broad range of feedback. This work empowered children and young people to create a set of 15 expectations that they feel all professionals should adopt. These are referred to as the “Statement of Expectations”.



STATEMENT OF EXPECTATIONS FROM CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

1. If you say you are going to do something, DO IT. If it can't happen then check back in with me and explain why.
2. I won't always agree with you, my views should be respected even if adults disagree with them.
3. Don't make excuses; tell us honestly rather than being vague and unclear.
4. Respect confidentiality, ask before sharing. We know there are times what we say has to be passed on, we ask that we are told that is going to happen and to whom the information is being passed.
5. Young people's wishes should be taken seriously. Why ask us what we think or want, if it has no influence on what happens. This builds false hope. Don't ask our opinion if you have already made your decision, what would it change? I want to see, how what I have said, and influences the way forward.
6. We are young not stupid, don't patronize us. Our words should have the same weight as an adult.
7. Difference doesn't mean BAD or WRONG, embrace my differences.
8. Professionals should be knowledgeable and passionate about the topic.
9. Young people want to know that the adult is qualified and relatable. We need to be able to build a valued relationship.
10. Make commitments and appointments and stick to them. To cancel a meeting can lead to us thinking you don't value us.
11. Is the young person comfortable? If not do something about it! Think about the way to build a positive relationship.
12. All adults should take on board young people's concerns and ideas. Help us find the solution rather than impose your own on us.
13. Honesty is a good way to build trust.
14. We are all unique, our problem is unique, and the solution should be unique! One size DOES NOT fit all.
15. We need to be an equal partner in any relationship, we are as important as any adult.



VOICE

12



AS PART OF THE TAMESIDE CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PLAN, WE ARE LOOKING TO FIND OUT WHAT CHILDREN WANT OUT OF THE IMPROVEMENT PROCESS, AND THEY HAVE TOLD US THEY WOULD LIKE TO SEE:

- More people to be available in the service and that they are easy to get to know and get in touch with.
- Fewer changes of social worker.
- To get the right service at the right time if something happens.
- Everyone working with them to be aware of their role in safeguarding.
- All professionals working with young people have an agreed understanding of what "Voice of the child" means.
- Support from specialists when needed.
- Caring foster carers, who know their children and what they need.
- Young people told us they want to know what they say will make a difference. If it hasn't why is that?
- Young people felt that "Voice of the child" is a well meant phrase but young people express scepticism about the statement.



TO ADDRESS THAT YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE CREATED A “STATEMENT OF EXPECTATION”. THEY WOULD LIKE TO SEE THIS ADOPTED ACROSS ALL ORGANISATIONS AND PROFESSIONS THAT WORK WITH YOUNG PEOPLE.

- A second document produced in a more young people friendly format, to empower young people to be able to see themselves within it.
- The document should be written to embrace all young people, as well as specific groups of young people.



A B C D E F

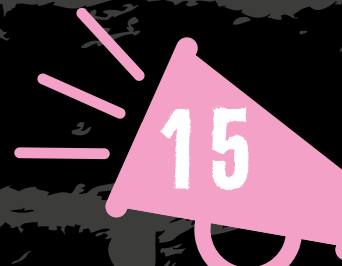


INCORPORATING THE VOICE OF THE CHILD IN PRACTICE AND IN STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT HAS BENEFICIAL OUTCOMES BOTH FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE, AND FOR THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND ITS PARTNERS:

FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE:

- They have an increased understanding of organisations and how to access and influence them.
- The “Statement of Expectation” brings clarity for young people. This reassures young people to have an agreed common understanding of what to expect.
- There is better awareness of the rights of children looked after, and the responsibility of organisations that act as corporate parents.

- Children and young people to develop new skills and confidence while participating in service development.
- Children and young people feel more confident about, and see the benefits of speaking up. Children and young people are the experts in their own lives; they need their views and opinions to have the same weight as adults.
- Children and young people will have a foundation of expectations that crosses all organisations. Empowering a common understanding that is relevant to all will provide a great sense of joined up thinking.
- Young people will develop and deliver a training packing around the Statement of Expectations to deliver to professionals, to ensure a common understand of each principal.



FOR ORGANISATIONS:

- Better understanding and fresh perspective on providing for children looked after.
- Organisations can adopt the “Statement of Expectations”, developing a solid foundation to build upon with their staff but also as a way to measure their performance against.

- Services are more accountable to children and young people as they have a clear foundation of understanding that children and young people are saying is important to them.
- Services are more targeted/focused therefore more efficient.
- All services have a common framework to build upon, which enhances children and young people’s experience when working with multiple agencies.



VOICE



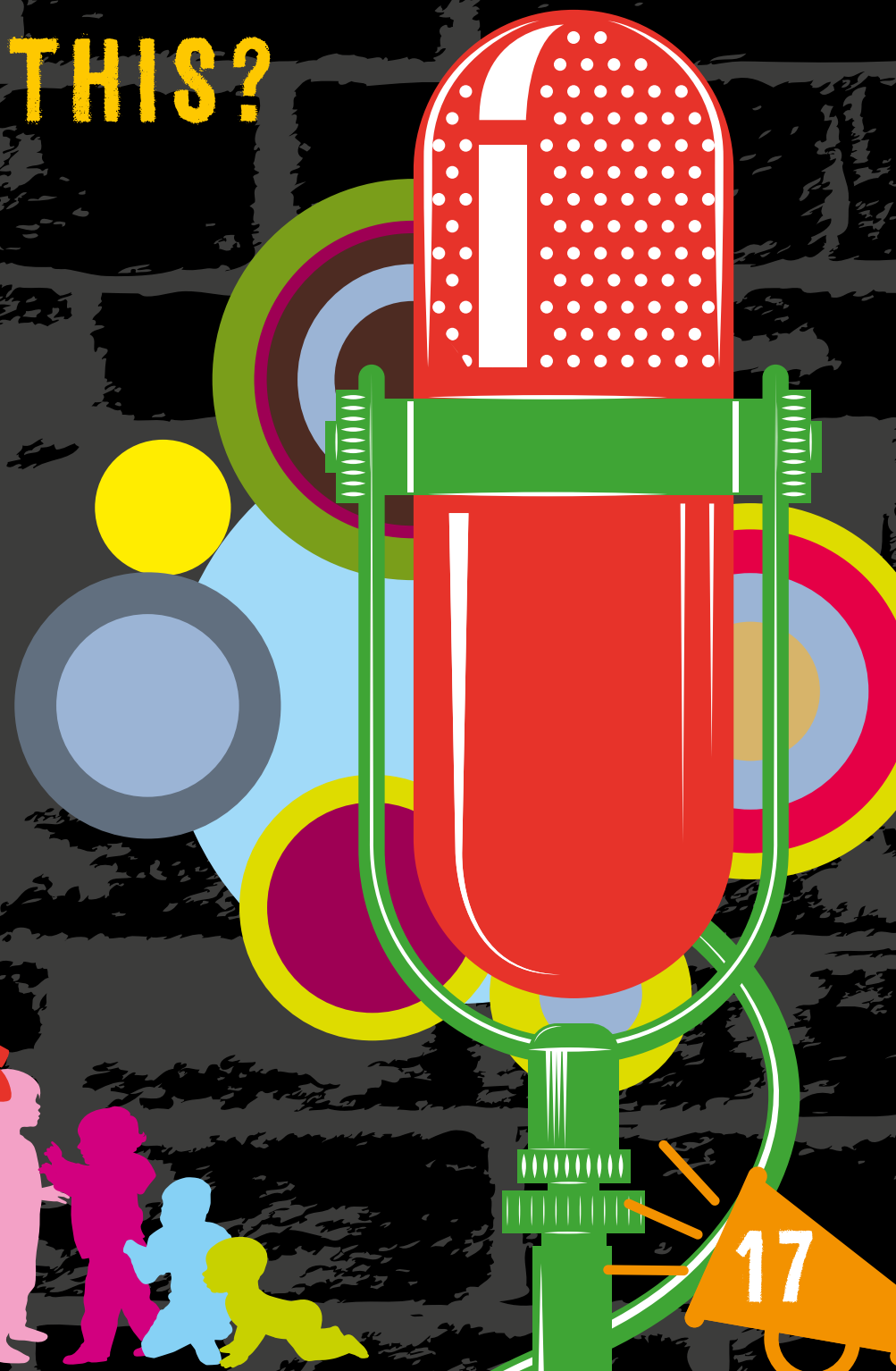
HOW WILL WE ACHIEVE THIS?

Practitioners are able to make decisions that are informed by the views, wishes and feelings of children and young people in Tameside.

Access to training and resources will be available to practitioners from all services and staff such as social care, health, the police and education. The Statement of Expectation and the Tameside Pledge will be the platform for all training and resources.

The Practice Standards for Children's Social Care will outline the requirements of Social Workers when working with children and their families.

All professionals must be accountable to children and young people at every point of contact. There will be emphasis on the quality and frequency of recording the voice of the child in case files, so that practitioners can evidence that the wishes of the child are at the heart of the decisions that are made about them, and so that views about the quality of services can be collated and used for wider improvement.



Children and young people are helped to understand their legal entitlements.

Children need to be aware of their right to be heard and their right to affect what happens to them in order to be able to contribute effectively.

For example, as well as having the opportunity to attend their meetings, children need to be given the right information about their rights in a way that they can understand. Children that need additional support will be made aware of their right to an Independent Advocate should they need it.

Advocacy seeks to ensure that some of our most vulnerable individuals have their views and wishes genuinely considered when decisions are being made about their lives.

Children will be actively supported and listened to through the development of links and wider networks with other agencies.

A memorandum of understanding will be developed between existing youth groups such as the Children in Care Council, Youth Council and School Forums. The Memorandum will help to formalise links between the different groups so that that are aware of each other, what they do and are able to talk to one another.

A Youth Participation Network will be created that makes it easy for children and young people to engage in a group that is relevant to them. The Network will allow the memorandum of understanding to be put into practice and will work towards making the collective views of children and young people equal to that of any other professional organisation.



VOICE OF THE CHILD DELIVERY PLAN

ACTIONS	MILESTONE	DELIVERY DATE	LEAD	OUTCOMES/PERFORMANCE MEASURE	PROGRESS UPDATE
Launch the Voice of the Child Strategy inc. Statement of Expectation.	Event is promoted and bookings are being taken via TSCB Online booking system.	March 2018	Emma Armitage	All partner agencies sign up to, and practitioners routinely work to, the 'Statement of Expectations' when working with children and their families.	
Deliver Voice of the Child Training x2 year as part of the TSCB Training Programme.	Young People develop the content of the training course.	Begin April 2018	Andy McLean	Practitioners work to the 'Statement of Expectations' when working with children and their families.	
Develop and promote a suite of 'good practice' tools for practitioners to access.	Partners share their existing tools Resources are available to access via the TSCB website	June 2018	Ged Sweeney	Practitioners engage with children in a meaningful way that helps them to plan their support and intervention better.	
Establish a Youth Participation Network that helps to connect the various youth forums together.	1st meeting in April 2018.	April 2018	Melissa Hopwood & Laura Windsor-Welsh	Children find it easier to find and access a youth forum that is relevant to them. Youth Forums know what each other is doing, share good practice and key message, and have a greater collective influence.	
Youth Participation Network write a memorandum of understanding that will exist between the various youth forums.	Youth Participation Network meets for the 1st time in April.	June 2018	Melissa Hopwood & Laura Windsor-Welsh	Youth Forums know what each other is doing, share good practice and key message, and have a greater collective influence.	
Check that the Tameside Pledge and Statement of Expectation are adhered to.	Performance Mgt and QA via TSCB inc; • S.11 & Multi-Agency Audit • Youth Participation Officer Young People led review 12 months after the launch of the Voice of the Child Strategy.	August 2018 April 2019	TSCB QA Officer TSCB QA Officer	Professionals have a good understanding of the daily lived experience of the children they support. Professionals know what children want to change and how and deliver services around the wishes of the children they work with.	



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