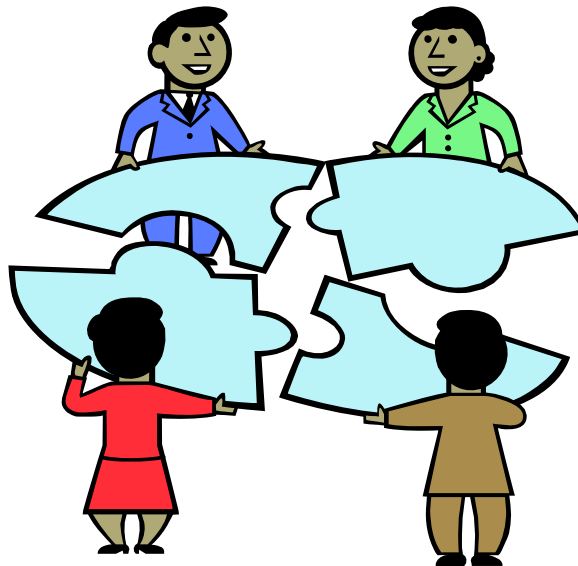


**Getting parents, mothers, fathers and carers  
involved in children's services**

**Taking part in the Newcastle Parent and Carer  
Strategy  
2006 – 2009  
Summary**



Any enquiries about the Parent and Carer Participation Strategy should be directed to:

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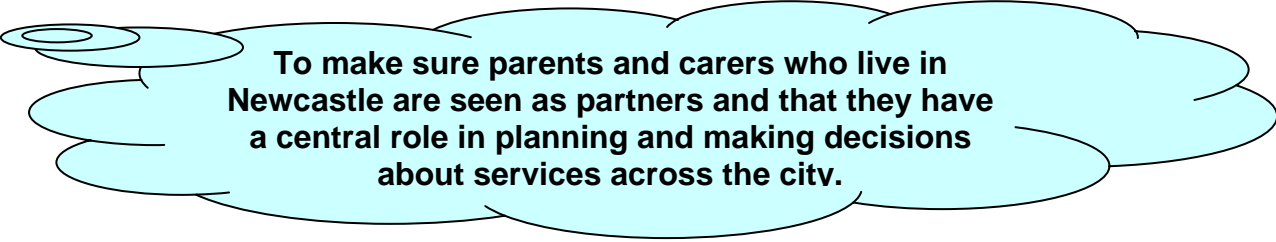
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In Newcastle, we want parents and carers to have a role in planning and making decisions about children's services. We want to give parents and carers the power and confidence to carry out this role.

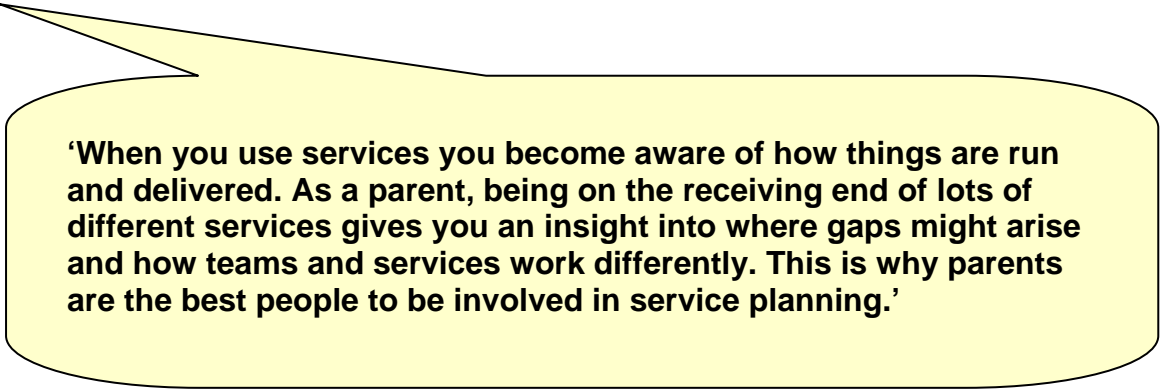
### **Our vision**



**To make sure parents and carers who live in Newcastle are seen as partners and that they have a central role in planning and making decisions about services across the city.**

### **In Newcastle, we believe:**

- ✓ parents and carers are the most important influence for their children;
- ✓ children's services are active partners in delivering improved outcomes for children;
- ✓ parents and carers are vital in planning, monitoring, assessing and making decisions about current and future services; and
- ✓ children's services will benefit and improve from involving parents and carers (including in recruitment and selection processes and assessing services, where appropriate).



**'When you use services you become aware of how things are run and delivered. As a parent, being on the receiving end of lots of different services gives you an insight into where gaps might arise and how teams and services work differently. This is why parents are the best people to be involved in service planning.'**

**(Comment from a parent carer)**

## Who this strategy is for

In this strategy, the term **'parent'** means anyone who has parental responsibility for a child or young person. This includes mothers, fathers, grandparents, other family members and guardians, including the local authority (if children are looked after by the local authority).

The term **'carer'** means a person who regularly provides a large amount of unpaid care for a disabled child, or a child with specific learning difficulties or health issues (including drug and alcohol issues). This includes foster carers for any child, whether or not they are disabled, as foster carers do not have parental responsibility.

The strategy covers **how all parents and carers who are involved with children's services take part in the decision-making process, no matter what their** race, culture, disability, religion, age, sex or sexuality. We will take account of any specific conditions we need to involve parents and carers equally (such as interpreters).

Involving teenage parents and young carers is part of the children and young people's participation strategy and the young carers' strategy. However, as parents or carers, this does not mean they should be excluded from the principles in this strategy.

When planning and delivering children's services, we must consider the views of all those involved but we will rightly prioritise the best interests of the child or young person. At times, children and young people may have different opinions to their parents or carers. It is important that each opinion or view is set out, the reasons for decisions are clear and **decision-making processes are transparent.**

The purpose of this strategy is to **build on best practice at grass-roots level** and promote more opportunities for all agencies, parents and carers to work together.

We expect that all agencies signed up to the Newcastle plan for children and young people will support and actively promote this strategy.

Parents and carers can get involved in many ways, including parenting courses and school activities, or being part of planning groups for their nursery or children's centre. Some parents and carers may then want to become more involved at local, regional or national levels.

**'If services ask parents first what they need to support their children it will save a lot of time and money going on things we don't need.'**

**(Comment from a parent)**

## **Our aims are as follows.**

- To make sure parents and carers are part of the decision-making, planning and assessment processes for children's services in Newcastle.
- For children's services to recognise and value the contribution parents and carers make in the lives of their children and young people.
- To make sure that we listen to and fully consider parents' and carers' views.
- For agencies to be transparent and say where parents and carers can influence change and where they cannot.
- For agencies to actively involve parents and carers in planning and making decisions about services.
- To make sure parents and carers know how agencies will consider their views while taking into account the rights of the child or young person.
- To give regular feedback and updates to parents and carers so that they can see where and how they have influenced change.
- To make sure agencies can show where parents and carers have taken part in a meaningful way.
- To recognise agencies which involve parents and carers as much as possible.
- For agencies to use plain language and communicate effectively with parents and carers at all levels.
- To make sure agencies provide information for parents and carers when they first contact children's services.
- For elected parent and carer representatives to have the right tools and support to be able to represent parents and carers both locally and across the city.

We have developed an action plan to achieve our aims, which is attached to the main strategy. You can get a copy of this from [www.newcastlechildrenservices.org.uk/parentparticipation](http://www.newcastlechildrenservices.org.uk/parentparticipation).

## **Our strategy will make sure that:**

- ☑ each agency develops a service which reflects local needs and hopes;
- ☑ everyone has clear access to services when they need them – either for themselves or for their children;
- ☑ each agency develops partnerships which will allow them to draw more easily on the knowledge and support of parents, and carers when working with their children;
- ☑ parents' and carers' views are built into all our systems for planning and monitoring services; and
- ☑ parents and carers are recognised and valued as partners in planning and developing services.

**'I think the best way to get changes to services is to meet with the providers of the services themselves.'**

**(Comment from a parent carer)**

## **This strategy will concentrate on:**

- ↳ developing the skills and confidence of parents and carers through a range of training opportunities;
- ↳ promoting an environment that meets the needs of parents and carers and allows them to fully take part;
- ↳ making sure parents and carers have the proper resources to allow them to effectively represent themselves;
- ↳ developing, promoting and putting in place best practice;
- ↳ developing staff across all services and organisations; and
- ↳ setting up partnerships with a number of agencies, and taking a 'whole-systems' approach (everyone working together).

## **Updates and feedback**

**Parents and carers must be able to directly see where changes have been made as a result of them being involved.**

There must be clear and transparent processes for collecting regular feedback in a variety of ways.

Agencies, strategies and individual members need to be open, to change and develop ways of working that involve sharing some of their power with parents and carers. However, it is equally important that parents and carers are aware of which processes they can and cannot influence and be part of. Timescales

and government directives sometimes make it hard to fully involve parents and carers.

**'The fact that I got a letter explaining what had happened from the consultation day made all the difference to me.'**

**(Comments from a parent)**

### **Principles for involving parents and carers**

- **Work in partnership with parents and carers**
- **Involve parents and carers from the start**
- **Be positive and approachable**
- **Be realistic about timescales for involving parents and carers properly**
- **Respond and feedback to parents' and carers' contributions**
- **Provide information that is easily accessible and up to date**
- **Allow parents and carers to take part through support and training**
- **Be open and honest about what can and cannot be done**

(Parent and Carer Participation Group)

### **Glossary**

**Agencies** –the different services and organisations who are part of the children and young people's strategic partnership and children's services. They are listed in the Newcastle plan for children and young people.

**Consultation** – when we give people some choices about changes that we are going to make and ask them to tell us what they think about them.

**Grass roots** – services and professionals that work face-to-face with parents and carers and know their views and issues.

**Outcomes** – the final result of something (in other words, the changes people see to services they receive).

**Strategy** – a plan that sets out how we will deliver services.

**Transparent** – making sure everyone, including parents and carers, can see how, why and when we have made decisions.

