



<b>Report to:</b>	West Yorkshire Combined Authority
<b>Date:</b>	14 March 2024
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Working Towards a Child First Approach in the Combined Authority</b>
<b>Director:</b>	Liz Hunter, Director Policing, Environment and Place
<b>Author:</b>	Georgia Watkinson, Violence Reduction Partnership Research & Evaluation Specialist

Is this a key decision?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information or appendices?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, state paragraph number of Schedule 12A, Local Government Act 1972, Part 1:	
Are there implications for equality and diversity?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

## 1. Purpose of this Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek endorsement to taking a Child First approach in the Combined Authority and agree to the development of a framework and charter. These will be co-produced with children in West Yorkshire to ensure their voices are at the heart of the approach moving forward.

## 2. Information

### **Background to the Approach**

- 2.1 Child First is a summary of *what works* when working with children and can be used to support decision making by giving consideration for how children specifically will be impacted by the work we do. This can be adopted throughout our policy development, project implementation and service delivery, from frontline practitioners working directly with children, to designing services and interventions for children.
- 2.2 The West Yorkshire Plan highlights the vision of *a brighter West Yorkshire – a place that works for all*, so it is essential children are involved in achieving this. The Plan states that to deliver our missions and meet our 2040 vision, collaboration is key. This collaboration

should include children, whether this be through co-production, co-design or consultation to ensure that our vision for the future of West Yorkshire aligns with children's vision too. Adopting Child First aligns to the Mayor's priorities around community engagement by using the voice of children to shape the plans for the future of West Yorkshire.

2.3 There is already existing good practice within the Combined Authority, for instance:

- The Youth Hub User Research project, currently commissioned by WYCA, will help inform the design of future Youth Employment provision in the region, through capturing the voice/experience of young people currently accessing employment support provision.
- The Mayor's Green Jobs Taskforce Recommendations were developed and designed with a range of stakeholders, including children and young people. This engagement came through a 'Green Skills Summer School', commissioned by the Employment & Skills Team and delivered by Ahead Partnership in 2022.
- The Apprenticeship and Technical Education Pilot (commissioned by WYCA and delivered jointly by WYCA/Amazing Apprenticeships) finished its first year of delivery in 2023, has been iteratively designed by young people throughout, and co-design of the next element of the programme will be done in partnership with young people.
- The Schools Partnership Team's Enterprise Advisers programme sees local businesses go into secondary schools, sixth forms and further education colleges to support children and young adults with their skills and employability, enhancing their career outcomes. This is based on research evidence that found a *young person who has four or more encounters with an employer is 86% less likely to be unemployed or not in education or training and can earn up to 18% more in their career.*
- The Mayor's Big Climate Chat includes a specific consultation aimed at school students to capture their views on the climate crisis. This survey was co-designed with children and young people alongside the Youth Work Unit. A face-to-face Climate Conversation was also held with members of the Youth Work Unit and the Regional Youth Climate Assembly.
- At the Convention of the North, the Combined Authority invited 60 secondary school children from around the North to provide insights into the policy discussions. After providing invaluable input into the four thematic workshop sessions on the first day of the conference, which will shape the emerging Manifesto for the North, a summary of key issues and concern was presented at the plenary session on the second day. A key ask to the adults in the room was to listen more to the voices of children.

- The Violence Reduction Partnership's [Youth Commission](#) conducted peer research with children and young people across West Yorkshire between May and October 2023. They produced a set of recommendations and presented these to partners at an event in October and are currently co-producing a social media campaign based on their priorities.
- On Monday 19 February 2024 the Mayor held a West Yorkshire Youth Conference. The event was co-produced with, and hosted by the Mayor's Youth Advisory Group and was informed by data gathered from over 2000 young people. The conference provided a platform for young people to voice their views, experiences and concerns in relation to policing, crime and community safety issues. This event was led by young people and the actions from the conference will be driven by young people too.

2.4 It is proposed that the Combined Authority finds ways to enhance ongoing work by keeping the voice of the child central and being conscious of the language we use and the effect it can have.

2.5 There are already a number of business areas where this approach is evidenced and that the Combined Authority can learn from partners, particularly the five districts. For example, this approach aligns to the child friendly ambitions of both [Leeds](#) and [Bradford](#) and will be a continuation of the existing Child First practice embedded in each district's Youth Justice Service. It also supports the Violence Reduction Partnership and the Integrated Care Boards's [Adversity, Trauma & Resilience Programme's](#) ambition of being a trauma informed region by 2030, as adopting a Child First approach will help ensure a trauma informed approach for children in West Yorkshire. Further examples of best practice within districts and with partners are outlined below:

- Bradford – Bradford Youth Service involve children and young people in co-producing their programmes of work. They are also involving children in creative projects, such as the weapons sculpture to continue the legacy of the knife angel that was hosted in Bradford in April 2023.
- Calderdale – The Calderdale Safeguarding Children Partnership have a number of 'Young Advisors' who are responsible for gathering views and feedback from children in Calderdale. They have also created a [manifesto](#), including a number of priorities that will influence the work of the Safeguarding Children Partnership.
- Kirklees – the Ashbrow Community Fund involved both children and families on the panel that determined where funding would be spent within the local area to support the community.
- Leeds – The [Project Shield](#) campaign to tackle serious youth violence in Leeds has included consultation with children across the district, with the Youth Services

running a consultation to come up with the name and motto for the project. There is also a competition aimed at children in Leeds to design the logo which will be used across the community safety partnership.

- Wakefield – The [Big Conversation](#) used creative engagement to capture the views of children around what they want for the future of Wakefield. This covered community safety, access to green space and transport which was conveyed in a *play in a day*.
- A central guiding principle in the Youth Justice Board’s strategic plan is creating a justice system that treats ‘children as children’. Within this context, it is focused on promoting a childhood removed from the justice system, with a focus on building a child’s pro-social identity whilst removing systemic barriers that prevent a child from achieving their full potential. By collaborating with children, we can better improve relationships between children and criminal justice agencies and improve community cohesion and social inclusion. This can help prevent children from being drawn into the Criminal Justice System, instead seeing opportunities for them to make positive contributions to their community and move towards an offending free future.

2.6 Whilst Child First is not new and many organisations adopt good practices, the approach here is to complement existing work whilst increasing its reach and focussing on sharing good practice.

### **Future Considerations For A Child First Approach In The Combined Authority**

2.7 Work has already started with teams across the organisation and the following table contains examples of questions that teams are starting to consider:

Corporate Objective	Questions to be considered from a Child First lens
Empowering our communities, towns and cities to thrive	For homes to be sustainable they need to meet the needs of future generations, what do children want for their future home?
Building a sustainable, nature rich and carbon neutral region	What would enable children to access green space? Do children feel safe in green spaces?
Creating an accessible, clean and customer focussed transport system	How is it accessible to children, including children with SEN? Do children feel safe when using public transport?

Supporting community safety and accountable, proactive policing	What makes children feel safe in their community to allow them to thrive? Where do they not feel safe?
Championing culture, sport and creativity	What barriers do children face to getting into culture or sport? Do they have access to the right facilities?
Driving economic growth and innovation to enable good jobs	What jobs do children want to do in the future? Are they available in West Yorkshire? Do they know what steps to take to get there? How does childcare responsibilities impact individual's access to work?
Enabling a diverse skilled workforce and accessible learning for all	Do children have access to the right skills and education to achieve their desired jobs? Are people from their community visible in these roles? What barriers do they see to them achieving their ambitions?

- 2.8 The Combined Authority have already delivered presentations on the Child First approach and how it can be applicable in our core business and across some of our partnerships such as the Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP) launch event and a Leeds providers forum. Future sessions are scheduled with Bradford Community Safety Partnership, VRP Education Symposium, West Yorkshire Adversity Trauma & Resilience Knowledge Exchange, and further internal training sessions.
- 2.9 A workshop resource pack has been created and shared across the partnership to enable consultation with children to develop both the framework and charter. These workshops are due to continue until the end of April, after which, a thematic analysis will be conducted and pulled together into a framework.
- 2.10 To ensure that the development of this approach is developed in line with the wider partnership, the Combined Authority have established a multi-agency working group with representation from all five districts. This includes membership from youth justice, probation, children's social care, education, employment & skills, transport, policing & crime, youth work teams, local authority, custody and the VCSE. Membership of this group constantly evolves and is responsive to need.
- 2.11 The Combined Authority may have corporate parenting responsibilities as it is classed as an LA for the purposes of the legislation that defines the responsibilities. Given this, the Combined Authority will consider looked after children and care leavers where it is relevant in our decision making, to enable them to have the support and opportunities that should be available to all.

2.12 Below are some considerations for how we can embed a Child First approach within the Combined Authority. This list is not exhaustive and will be developed in line with feedback from both children and partners:

- All teams within the Combined Authority to be aware of the Child First approach, and how it impacts their areas of business. This will include making conscious language choices in line with the approach. Teams will be responsible for considering the impact of any personal data processing in their Child First approach, ensuring that data protection is considered in the design of their processes.
- Child First to be embedded into the internal EQIA process to support the Combined Authority's equity, diversity and inclusion priorities.
- Regular forums for children to come together with decision makers in the Combined Authority, including the Mayor, to discuss priorities, encourage co-production and involve children in decision making.

### **3. Tackling the Climate Emergency Implications**

3.1 While there are no direct benefits to reducing carbon emissions, we will need to engage and involve children in our work to tackle the climate emergency. This should improve the effectiveness of our campaigns and interventions.

### **4. Inclusive Growth Implications**

4.1 Adopting a Child First approach will see benefits to children's wellbeing as it will enable professionals to better recognise and address their unmet needs in a way that works for each individual child. This will have a knock-on effect to their ability to engage with education and training. The Child First approach is future-focused, and strengths based, meaning a key emphasis is put on raising children's aspirations and supporting them to achieve.

### **5. Equality and Diversity Implications**

- 5.1 Age is a protected characteristic therefore it is essential we consider the impact our decisions have on children. Incorporating a Child First approach in the Combined Authority will put an emphasis on this and provide teams with guidance on how to effectively involve children in decision making processes so they are at the heart of our work.
- 5.2 The Child First approach will also strengthen our existing approach to the public sector equality duty and the requirement for us to have due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity i.e. to have due regard to the need to remove or minimise disadvantage of those with a protected characteristic, the need to take steps to meet the

different needs of people with a protected characteristic; and the need to encourage participation in public life by underrepresented groups.

## **6. Financial Implications**

- 6.1 There may be resource implications as the approach becomes more embedded as a result of additional consultation needs, but there is currently no direct cost beyond that committed by the VRP.
- 6.2 As outlined above, investing our time in children now and allowing them to be involved in our work will help ensure that our 2040 vision is sustainable. The children in West Yorkshire now will be adults by 2040, so it is vital that our ongoing work considers the future needs of our children to prevent the need for future spending.

## **7. Legal Implications**

- 7.1 Adopting a Child First approach will support the Combined Authority in complying with its duties under the Equality Act 2010
- 7.2 The Combined Authority should have appropriate consideration to its corporate parenting approach. This places a special responsibility on West Yorkshire Combined Authority towards looked after children and care leavers to enable them to have the support and opportunities that should be available to all.
- 7.3 While there is no intention to collect any identifiable personal data of children, a child's opinion or inferences made by a child may amount to personal data processing if it can identify an individual (directly or indirectly). The implications of this could be increased high-risk data processing of children's personal data. Business areas will need to consider how to comply with the data protection principles with respect to children's rights and freedoms throughout the design of their processes in the Child First approach, ensuring consultation and engagement with children complied with data protection principles under the DPA2018 and UK GDPR.
- 7.4 In accordance with the voting arrangements of the Combined Authority, all Combined Authority members may vote on this item with the exception of the Non-Constituent Council Combined Authority Member.

## **8. Staffing Implications**

- 8.1 There are no staffing implications directly arising from this report.

## **9. External Consultees**

- 9.1 No external consultations have been undertaken.

## **10. Recommendations**

- 10.1 That the Combined Authority endorses a Child First approach by agreeing that the Combined Authority engage with children in the development of a framework and charter.

## **11. Background Documents**

There are no background documents referenced in this report.

## **12. Appendices**

None.