YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL SERVICES POLICY MAKING

by

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ABSTRACT

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Young people are recognised as citizens with rights and competence to participate in decision making. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Children Act 1989 identifies their right to participate in social services decision making. Much of the published information on their participation has focused on involvement as individuals in case planning rather than as stakeholders in strategic policy making. This research examines how a particular organisation – social services – has responded to the participation rights of young people who are looked after.

The thesis provides a critical review of current practice. It uncovers the extent of young people's participation in social services policy making and explores the perceptions of key stakeholder groups involved in the process. A national survey was used to elicit quantitative and qualitative information from a representative sample of social services departments. Semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders in the policy process provided data from three diverse case study sites.

Overall, data confirmed that stakeholders did not recognise young people's right to participate. Social services were unclear about the basis of their relationship with young people in the policy process; this confusion undermined young people's ability to influence policy decisions. Findings also showed that the power of managers in departments constrained the ability of young people to shape policy. Consumerism, rather than rights, was the underlying principle which defined participation as service-led rather than user-led.

In light of these findings, which emphasise the dissonance between the theory of participation and its practice, a number of recommendations are made at national and organisational level to improve the quality of young people's participation.

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Chapter 1: An Overview of the Thesis

1.1   Introduction

While the majority of children and young people never have contact with social services departments, some 58,000 (DoH 1998c) are looked after by local authorities, and this figure is on an upward curve. Although many more children have contact with social services departments, this study focuses on those looked after. They are a significant group of welfare service users whose basic needs and protection are intimately linked to social services. Research has shown that this group of young people are among the most vulnerable members of society who are likely to become socially excluded and make poor transitions to adulthood (Stein and Frost 1992; Willow 1997; Broad 1998; McCurry 1999; Coles 2000; Sinclair and Franklin 2000). They enter social services very low down on a scale of power or influence because they suffer multiple disadvantages including poor academic achievement, high rates of unemployment, early pregnancy and parenthood, high levels of benefit dependence, high levels of homelessness and are over-represented among young prisoners (DoH/SSI 1997). In addition, black children are overly represented in the looked after population and the services provided for them do not meet their specific needs (Barn 1993; Barn *et al* 1997). None of these disadvantages are of recent origin (Bebbington and Miles 1989). If social work departments are to become truly responsive to the needs of all their service users, the experiences, insights and desires of young people looked after should be a fundamental aspect of welfare planning, policymaking and service delivery.

This research investigates young people's participation in social services policy making. The impetus for the thesis is that despite research into children's rights, participation in social work case planning, and the development of service user movements, there is little published either on the extent of the participation of young users of statutory social services or on how service providers perceive participation. The study addresses these shortcomings by detailing the scope and nature of participation and

exploring the perceptions of involved. The nature of the study calls for the placing of participation in its wider social, professional and political context. Each of these strands requires a different approach.

The overall aims of the thesis are to provide a critical review of current practice, to determine the extent of young people's participation in social services, and to explore how departments are responding to the development of specific rights for young people. Policy recommendations, based on the study's findings, are directed to the improvement of the quality of young people's participation. The thesis takes into account the diverse ways in which young people participate in policy making alongside the diversity in perspectives held by key stakeholders in assessing how young people are viewed as a service user group and tests the underlying assumption of government policy that participation leads to improvements in the lives of young people looked after.

1.2   Main Argument of Thesis

Two main factors appear influential to young people's participation in social services policy making.

1. The changing view of children and young people: from passive objects of their parents or other adults, who lack the competence to make independent decisions to active independent citizens who have the ability and will to participate in all the decisions that affect them.

2. The changing role of welfare service users: from passive recipients of services devised and delivered by professionals to active consumers of welfare with rights and knowledge of their own position in society that give them the political power, expert status and moral authority to say what services they need and how these should be delivered.

Within this thesis I will argue that while the factors outlined above have brought young people into the policy making processes, organisational issues of power, especially the power of senior managers in social services,

means that their influence is latent rather than realised. Their participation is starting to bring changes to the way that social services take decisions and some young people do have power to shape the services they receive, but their role in the process has been constrained (shaped) by powerful adults who limit their involvement by framing the agendas and pace of change. This shaping of the debate controls the scope of young people's influence and means that although they are involved in the policy process their influence is often difficult to detect.

1.3   Why is Participation Important?

There are a number of reasons for encouraging young people's participation. Children are citizens and service users and share the same fundamental rights to participation as adults. Indeed, their rights to consultation have been promoted outside the nation state in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and in England and Wales through legislation (The Children Act 1989) and associated policy (Best Value Framework, Children's Service Plans and Quality Protects). Their participation also enhances the democratic process by helping young people to become active members of their community. Participation also has a more practical purpose. By getting involved children can contribute to the improvement of services by representing their diverse and changing needs and bringing about better informed decisions. Children also have the right to protection and by legitimising their voice participation addresses the failure of the authorities to listen to them, which has been a recurring theme of successive inquiries into abuse. Finally, participation empowers children and enhances their self-esteem both through being heard and through the acquisition of useful skills in debate, communication, negotiation, making priorities and decision-making (Sinclair and Franklin 2000).

1.4   A Developing Context

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states that any person under the age of eighteen years is considered a child. The UNCRC lays out specific rights for all young people. Included within these is a right to participate in decisions that affect the child (Article 12).

Although not legally enforceable in England and Wales, the UNCRC was ratified by the United Kingdom government in 1991. This ratification commits the state to pursue the principles of the UNCRC and the thinking behind it informed the parallel development of the Children Act 1989. This Act re-codified statutory social work practice.

More recent developments such as the Quality Protects initiative 1998 (part of the New Labour government's drive to modernise social services and ensure that they reflect the needs of users rather than providers of care) have reinforced the duty of social work departments to listen to, and take heed of, the views of children and young people. Inquiries into institutional child abuse have highlighted the dangers of not listening to the experiences of young service users. All these developments point to changes in practice that should encourage young people's participation in their personal care and wider departmental decision making.

Greater participation on the basis of specific rights located within children and young people as individuals have been developed alongside the rise of service user movements. Groups of adult service users inspired by the professional domination of the definition and solution of welfare needs have used methods developed by the civil rights movement and new social movements to challenge the balance of power in the provision of both statutory and voluntary welfare services. The coalescing of issue- or service-based groups around particular identities, and the consequence of identity based politics combined with government policy that encourages greater choice of service delivery, such as that included in the Community Care Act 1990, have led to the forging of a partnership approach to the provision of welfare that seeks to reduce the domination of welfare professionals. Given that the basis for the participatory relationship defines the practice, aims and outcomes for the process, a lack of clarity – around citizenship, empowerment, etc. – will lead to confusion and ineffectiveness.

My interest in this subject arises from my practice as a local authority social worker working with young people at the margins of society during the 1980s and 1990s. I observed departmental efforts to help young people

looked after participate in the processes that shape the services they receive. Although the adults involved in this work displayed a genuine desire to empower young people and produce services that reflected their needs, my contact with them produced an impression of a lack of clarity about participation, what it was for and how best to achieve its aims.

This confusion in the minds of participants produced scope for disappointment both amongst stakeholders and the young people, who expressed mixed feelings about their involvement. A lack of clarity of purpose appeared to be undermining developments that had the potential to improve the lives of young people looked after and in need.

In exploring ways in which young people have come to be in social services policy making, this thesis confines itself to the development of local internal policy, rather than national policy. It is concerned with the implementation of central government policy but not with its development. The study is confined to England and Wales, as Scotland and Northern Ireland have different legislative structures. A sample survey of local authority social service departments maintains this focus by gauging different levels of participatory activity, and interviews with policy stakeholders in three contrasting local authority case studies explore different local approaches to and perceptions of participation in the policy process.

Although the Children Act 1989 places a duty on local authority social services departments to listen to the views of young people they look after, this duty has been generally interpreted as a function of individual case management. An authority's responsibility is largely entrusted to professional social workers because they deal with the young people routinely. Baldry and Kemmis (1998), Thomas and O'Kane (1999), Morris (2000) and Shemmings (2000) have examined the way decisions are reached between young people, their carers and social workers within the ethos of partnership that the Act sets out to create. As the ethos of partnership permeates organisational practice, it raises the possibility of their potential power in group decision-making. The present concern is with policy making, rather than casework, and engages with young people's collective

interaction with policy stakeholders. Collective concerns are not directly about individual experiences but how those experiences can contribute to decisions taken about the services that young people use, and how they contribute to group participation in the planning and policy functions of local authority social work departments. Key questions include the ways in which collective participation has been developed. Is it piecemeal? How dependent is it on the commitment of particular individuals in departments? To what extent is there a general expectation that departments will work with young people when devising and delivering welfare services?

The election of the New Labour government in May 1997 brought a new policy focus on the social exclusion of marginalised groups. Young people who are looked after by social services departments are one such group, who are at particular risk of exclusion from the benefits of full community membership. The government recognised and supported the right of young people looked after to a say in decisions that affect them. This focus, on the importance of the role of young service users in the delivery of welfare, was part of a wider government strategy ostensibly to place the needs of service users at the heart of welfare by making those who provide services more accountable.

The government's general challenge to professional dominance and its call for partnership produced a growing expectation that social service users of all types will play an enhanced role in departmental decision making. The introduction of Quality Protects, the government's main initiative to improve children's welfare services, sets out in its framework what is required of social services departments in relation to young people. This study predates and overlaps with the implementation of the Quality Protects initiative. Accordingly, it illuminates the early stages of implementation of Quality Protects through its primary concern with the potential for participation.

1.5   Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 2 reviews the literature that sets out the case for young people's participation in decision making. It examines how children's rights and citizenship have informed the development of participatory frameworks. Policy and practice in the provision of welfare for young people are explored. Areas of concern are highlighted along with present government policy initiatives intended to address these problems. The review concludes with an exposition of the important role of managers in the delivery of welfare and the forces that shape their perceptions and role.

Chapter 3 reviews the recent history of child welfare research and the particular methods developed to explore young people's experiences.   The impetus for this work is investigated and categorised.   The chapter concludes with an exploration of the links between research and government policy making in child-care.

Chapter 4 begins with a discussion of research strategies that provides the context that informed the methodological choices made in this study. The particular ethical considerations when working with children and young people are identified and addressed. The methodology employed in the empirical work is described, as are the means of analysis.

Chapter 5 identifies the extent of young people's participation in social services policy making. It contains the results and interpretation of data produced by the national survey of social work departments and concludes with an interpretation of these findings.

Chapter 6 opens with descriptions of the three diverse case studies. It contains data from interviews with key stakeholders in the participatory process. The results of interviews and researcher perceptions are brought together to interpret how participation works in each department, how departments are responding to the development of specific rights for young people and how young people are viewed as a service user group. The diverse experiences of young people and other stakeholders are highlighted.

Differences and similarities between the cases, along with the reasons for them, are described and discussed.

Chapter 7 tests the empirical data with theories of the operation of power in society and inside organisations to test the underlying assumption of government policy that participation leads to improvements in the lives of young people looked after.

Chapter 8 concludes the thesis with a summary of the main findings and recommendations for the advancement of young people's participation in policy making.

Chapter 2: The Social, Political and Professional Context of Young People's Participation

2.1 Introduction

This thesis examines how young people participate in social services policy development. Their participation can mean two things. It can mean taking part or being present, or it can denote the transfer of power so that participants' views have real influence on decisions (McNeish 1999). Chapter 2 examines the factors that have led to their participation, the consequences this has for social services departments and the work that they do, and provides a context within which to understand young people's participation in social services policy development.

Historically, children and young people have appeared in policy research mainly as adjuncts to their families (Butler and Shaw 1996), but this lack of a specific focus on their needs as a social group is changing. Their position in society, the needs they have and the policies produced to address these needs is becoming an area of study in its own right. "To achieve child-centred social policies that afford children generally higher priority, we will need to both change the way we view children and increase their access to the policy process" (Daniel and Ivatts 1998 p.228). The present research is a part of this process because it examines the extent to which children and young people are participating in policy making and explores their participatory experiences in statutory social work departments. It explores the factors that have contributed to children's social repositioning in society and sets the context for participation in general before focusing on changes to the way that social work policy is developed.

Statutory social work is changing. Two significant developments are the organisational change that has resulted in social services departments working across traditional functional divides in the local state, and working closely with voluntary agencies to provide services (Coles 2000). Departments are pursuing a more holistic approach to the delivery of welfare with social work functions being linked to housing or health.

Secondly is the development of partnership working between service providers and service users. "A commitment to partnership practice has been reflected in all areas of public policy and is particularly clear in relation to personal social services" (Pinkerton 2001 p.250). These recent developments, reinforced by legislation from Conservative governments between 1989 and 1997 and Labour governments, have produced changes in the way that welfare services are managed and produced, which have affected the relationship between service users and service providers (Croft and Beresford 1992; Clarke *et al.* 1994; Leach *et al.* 1994; Barnes 1997). The legislative structure that provides a framework for decision making along with changes in the roles of key decision makers in welfare provision are analysed to place service user participation into its specific policy setting.

This chapter begins with an exploration of the organisational context of social services departments because the care system that looks after young people is administered through a politically controlled bureaucracy. The operation of power within bureaucratic organisations sets the context for young people's participation. A case is then made for young people's participation in decision making. This involves the exploration of the notion that young people's place in society is not biologically determined and also includes a discussion of the centrality of the debate about young people's competence to participate in decision making. The chapter moves on to a discussion of the moral and legal frameworks that set the possibilities and parameters of participation. Laws and international conventions enable and legitimise participation by young people as much as they do for adults. This leads into a concluding discussion on policy and practice with an historical dimension and a focus on problems and governments' solutions as they are defined currently. The prevailing political philosophy that drives recent government thinking is also reviewed.

The research takes place at a time when increasingly children's views are being canvassed by local and central government policy makers. It explores a particular set of services devised and delivered by statutory social work departments to see what lessons can be learned from current practice.

2.2   An Exploration of the Organisational Context

A major focus of this research is the impact of young people's participation on local authority social services departments. Whilst policy outcomes are clearly in question there is also a challenge to organisational culture. Young people looked after have until recently been regarded as clients of social services departments. Their interests and welfare are legally assumed by the welfare bureaucracy and attempts to involve them in decision making challenge existing standing practices. In particular they present a challenge to power within the organisation. Power in bureaucracies is concentrated and determined by rules. Those holding power also have status.

Although a contested concept, power has been generally defined by Weber (1972) as the probability of persons or groups carrying out their will even when opposed by others. The conventional or 'Statist' view has the state and its operationalisation of power at the centre and Weber was particularly concerned with "the independent powers of bureaucratic forms of organisation" (Pinch 1985 p.36). His perspective suggests that decisions taken by officials in bureaucracies, of which social services is an example, tend to support the survival of the organisation rather than respond to the desires of other stakeholders. Weber was concerned that bureaucracies were becoming more powerful than the governments or institutions they were designed to serve. He felt that those managers given legitimate power by their place in the bureaucracy would always support the existence and influence of the bureaucratic structure, rather than respond to the desires of policy makers who set out what organisations are for and users or 'customers' of the organisation. Weber describes a hierarchy of offices, with communication channelled through them, spheres of authority determined by general rules and governed by regulations that resemble social service departments. The concentration of power that this implies restricts influence on policy (Weber 1972; Collins 1987; Holton and Turner 1989; Parkin 1991; Lassman and Speirs 1994).

However, Weber's theories have little power of explanation in relation to particular policy initiatives. Lukes (1976) develops a '*Three-Dimensional View of Power',* an account of the exercise of power in political bureaucracies. By incorporating the work of Dahl, who examined decision-making in pluralist settings where members of minority groups maintain their independent cultural traditions, Lukes' synthesis provides a more sophisticated analysis which includes the ability of the powerful to define the agenda and shape preferences. Lukes develops an analysis of the complexities of power relationships between stakeholder groups. He shows that their relationships operate at more than one level and that power cannot be viewed as the simple exercise of force to pursue goals but the ability of the powerful to control the agenda. In this way, the status quo is maintained without any overt threat or even questions being raised about the way that the debate has been framed. Stakeholders may not be aware that their behaviour has been influenced and will not have experienced conflict.

Lukes' **one-dimensional view of power** is a focus on behaviour, decision-making, key issues, observable (overt) conflict and subjective interests, seen as policy preferences revealed by political participation. One group has the power to threaten sanctions or invoke an implicit threat to maintain power. It can be seen when group A can succeed in affecting what group B does.

The **two-dimensional view of power** is a qualified critique of the behavioural focus, which examines decision-making and non-decision-making, issues and potential issues, observable (overt or covert) conflict and subjective interests seen as policy preferences or grievances. It shows that the way that debates are shaped by what is seen as reasonable and realistic are important factors in maintaining authority.

The **three-dimensional view of power** is a fundamental critique of the behavioural focus which is concerned with decision-making and control over the political agenda, issues and potential issues, observable (overt or covert) and latent conflict and subjective and real issues. The shape of the organisation is an important factor in the decision-making process, where the socially constructed and culturally patterned behaviour of groups and the practices of institutions are implicitly connected to the exercise of power.

Power is seen as a function of collective forces and social arrangements where bias results from the form of the organisation.

In operationalising power in the policy process Levin (1997) advocates a concentration on policy intent and appraisal using three manifestations of power that are derived from Lukes. He uses case studies from the 1987 Conservative government to examine the policy making process and the power that different stakeholders have to influence the shape of policy. He has identified the three types of power that are used in the policy making process: power to do, power over and power to achieve.

Power to do - literally what an individual is actually able to do; to make a decision alone.

Power over - the power of an individual or group over another individual or group to direct their actions or behaviour.

Power to achieve - the power to realise one's will and determine that a policy will incorporate at least some of the characteristics desired by the power holder.

Power in a political structure can be considered fruitfully outside a pluralist schema. Foucault (1980, 1991) contends that at the macro level the conventional state and pressure group configuration is no longer able to provide sufficient explanations of the operation of power. Foucaudian discourse breaks through the notion of monopoly powers by the state to real problems of governance. Young people looked after are amenable to such analysis because the state is also their parent. Foucault's ideas contribute to the interpretation of the nuances of stakeholder relationships: how young people's contact with other stakeholders (managers, elected members and front-line workers) may influence them, or how young people are influenced and how this shapes their perceptions of the policy process (Rainbow 1984; Merquior 1991).

Gramsci's (1996) concept of hegemony also contends the assumptions of pluralist explanations by placing compliance clearly outside the political ort policy process. Whereas Lukes argues that power may be exercised without those who have an interest being aware, Gramsci argues that a hegemonic

ideology entails control or the exercise of power by inducing people to accept the way that things are done. Rather than being exercised by overt displays of authority, power is evident in people's acceptance of the values of the powerful (Kolakowski 1978; Simon 1991).

Hegemony can be regarded as the sort of power that adults exercise over children. In this research young people encounter political or bureaucratic power because family relationships are mediated through a corporate parent. Hegemony relies on leaders – in the present context within local government – having their authority accepted as the natural order of things, without the need to exercise authoritarian power.

2.3 The Case for Young People's Participation in Decision Making

The impetus for young people's participation in social work services does not come from organisational reform. It is part of wider changes that have taken place in the way that children are viewed, how they relate to adults and what is expected of them. Their transformation from being perceived as the property of their parents to an adjunct of the family and latterly individuals in their own right sets the general context for participation. The case for participation has also been advanced by global changes and national legislation that forwards the interests of young people as individuals.

2.3.1 Children in society

With the emergence of a 'new sociology of childhood' children's status within society has been questioned and repositioned. This 'new sociology' draws heavily on earlier studies that have revealed the diversity of experience within historical and social space that is childhood. A starting point for much of this new thinking has been the work of historian Phillipe Aries (1962).

Aries contends that children's place in society is not fixed but has evolved in different historical epochs. He studied the archaeology of childhood images and suggested that there was no separate social space that could be

called childhood prior to the medieval period and that the concept was developed during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries among professional and property owning classes (Aries 1962; Hayden *et al*. 1999). Childhood as we would recognise it was established in Europe in the mid-eighteenth century and appears as an age based hierarchy institutionalised in the relationships between children and adults (Aries 1962; James *et al*. 1998). Aries' chronology has been challenged and criticised because of its association of childhood with modernity, and failure to address the childhood experiences of cultures other than European (Hayden *et al*. 1999), but his description of childhood as a distinct social space that changes over time and between cultures has led to the development of particular studies on the different experiences children have during their development.

Aries' work helped to define childhood as a phase of life constructed by people rather than being biologically determined or a natural state common to all. Although his work has been criticised for its Eurocenterism, his concept of childhood as a social construction has come to dominate modern scholarly thinking and has helped to delineate the parameters of childhood studies.

> *Childhood is a social construction brought about through the influence of cultural mores and practised values experienced by the community groupings in which children may find themselves. This socialisation process is the way by which children develop into unique individuals who also feel themselves to be a part of a cultural community. The level at which children feel a sense of belonging will vary according to the status different cultural communities bestow on them.*
>
> *(Lloyd-Smith and Tarr 2000 p.62)*

In western societies this construction has tended to move children away from public spheres, like work and commerce, into the private spheres of the home and school. Qvorturp *et al*. (1994) argue that children have become separated from adults and thereby disenfranchised, forced into a state of dependency and obliged to be 'seen and not heard'. Their absence from the public realm means that they have few opportunities to demonstrate competence in decision making or develop the skills and confidence

required to take part in such activities effectively. Their absence predetermines their incompetence in relation to adults to make decisions. The notion that adults invariably know best is a cultural proposition opposed to participation that raises issues that need to be addressed in the delivery of welfare services to young people (Matthews 2001).

The modern western construction of childhood places children in a passive, dependent and vulnerable role in marked contrast to adults. Archard (1993) challenges this construction and can find no tangible reason for young people's disempowerment. In this sense there is some similarity between the experiences of women and those of young people. The exclusion of the young from what are understood to be adult spheres is no more normal or preordained than was the disenfranchisement of women because politics was considered as an adult male sphere or through the continued exclusion of women from parts of the labour market. Once the proposition of social construction is accepted it redefines who could and should be involved in individual, organisational and community decisions and opens what were previously adult domains to include young people.

These ideas have been developed by authors such as James and Prout (1990), James *et al*. (1998) and Jenks (1996) who set out the case for a particular focus on childhood in society. This 'new sociology of childhood' has produced typologies of childhood that are useful when analyzing young people's participation. Their work integrates four typologies of childhood against major theoretical dichotomies used in the social sciences. These are 'the tribal child', 'the minority group child', 'the social structural child' and 'the socially constructed child'. The theoretical dichotomies include structure/agency, identity/difference, local/global and continuity/change. The dichotomies are used to theorize children's place as social beings and help produce hypotheses about their position in society and the formal organizations that are part of it. The effects of new roles in society can be described and quantified by the application of typologies to theoretical positions. So as children move along a continuum from action limited by structure to independence and agency, the effects of their new positions can be assessed, as can the operation of universal rights in particular local

settings. Figure 2.1 illustrates the dichotomies in relation to the typologies of childhood.

VOLUNTARISM
AGENCY
DIFFERENCE

Tribal child   Minority group child

PARTICULARISM   UNIVERSALISM
LOCAL   GLOBAL
CHANGE   CONTINUITY

Socially constructed child   Social structural child

IDENTITY
STRUCTURE
DETERMINISM
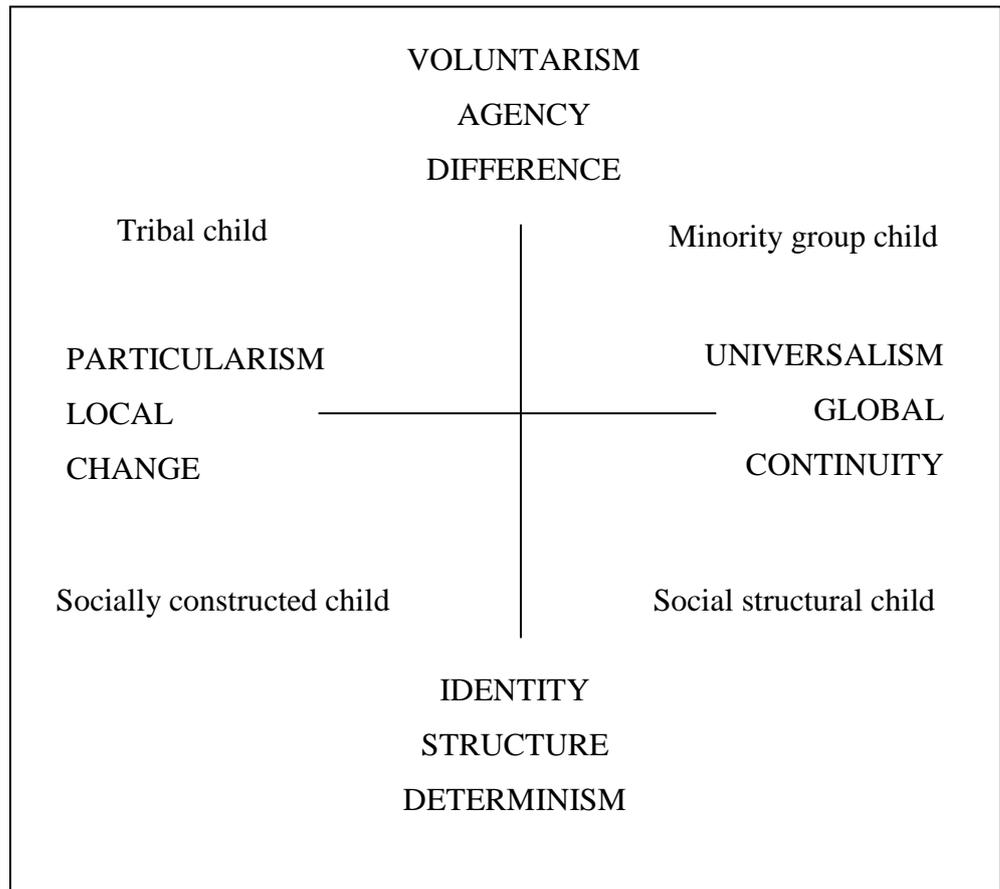
(Source: James *et al.* 1998 p. 206)

***Figure 2.1: Childhood located in theoretical dichotomies: a model*.**

In the **socially constructed child**, on the lower left of the model, issues of plurality, diverse constructions and the lack of a universal view predominate. This typology highlights the diversity of children's experiences of childhood and their potential role as qualified informants on their own social position. Their experiences are valid in themselves and challenge perceptions of children as a homogeneous group, who share the same needs or face the same problems. Childhood is a generalisable but potentially diverse category based on changing social relationships and structures of society.

The **tribal child**, or anthropological approach, on the upper left of the model, is a typology incorporating the child's view, the children's childhood,

or the autonomous community of children constructed separately from the adult world. It is … "a conception of the child drawn on by ethnographers that suggests that children perform more effectively as social agents when they are separated from the adult world" (Wyness 2000 p.26). Such a view is exemplified in the work of the Opie and Opie (1969) who studied the ethnography of children's games and the life of the school-yard. Adult knowledge of this world can lead to increased control over children's lives and its separateness from adults removes it from concerns about participation.

The **minority group child**, on the upper right of the model, is a typology created where the universal child becomes a minority group with demands that have to be heard. That the group is fractured and faceted in diversity is less often remarked. The minority group child is usually associated with universal rights for children, such as the UNCRC (1989). Possession of rights, however, does not mean that they can be guaranteed. For example, the possession of rights to education or protection in western countries does not in itself guarantee that the state will provide secure environments and appropriate teaching. It does however provide a moral imperative and framework to challenge practices that work against young people's interests (Freeman 2000).

The **social structural child**, on the lower right of the model, combines universal characteristics and institutional structures in society, such as education and child welfare organisations. Childhood becomes a space that people pass through on their way to adulthood. This conception of childhood as a state of waiting or limbo diminishes young people and is heavily critiqued by the 'new sociology of childhood'. "Children are not pathological or incomplete; they form a group, a body of social actors, and as citizens they have needs and rights" (James *et al*. 1998 p.32).

In relation to this study's focus on young people's participation in policy making, the issues are matters of indifference when they are conceptualised as the tribal child and are largely irrelevant to the social structural child because the adult conceptions of competence and the structure of adult

organisations are precisely those which have hindered children's participation in decision-making. The issues are, however, central when young people are conceptualised as the minority child and part of the diversity which characterises the socially constructed child.

The critical and descriptive power provided by the typologies derives from a single idea. That is the idea that children are not silent, passive social actors but have voices that should be taken into account. This has challenged the acceptance of decision making as an exclusively adult activity. The wider acceptance of this proposition and the emergence of the 'new sociology of childhood' underpin the case for young people's participation in decision making. It has produced calls for research conducted by young people. While there is no shortage of research on children produced by adults, the paucity of information from children's perspectives is highlighted in several accounts (Qvortrup 1990; Butler and Williamson 1994; Brannen and O'Brien 1996; Butler and Shaw 1996; Hill 1997a).

Although children are increasingly recognised as social actors in their own right with a voice that when articulated can affect the situations they inhabit, they are not a homogeneous group but reflect the difference and diversity of wider society. Differences of location, class, gender, race and physical or mental abilities all contribute to the different ways childhood will be experienced by different children. The polyphony of children's voices and their competence to comment (Colton and Hellinckx 1993) underpins this study of the relationship that welfare service providers have with young service users. The existence of 'a voice' potentially changes passive recipients of services designed by adults into service users or citizens with a critique of their own situation and ideas about responses that they feel are more appropriate than others.

2.3.2   Citizenship, rights and young people

By emphasising their capacity as social actors with insight and competence to participate in all aspects of their lives, recent research in childhood studies has helped reposition young people in society (James and Prout

1990; Qvortrup *et al*. 1994). Children are no longer regarded as empty vessels waiting to be filled with adult virtues, simply as adults in waiting, or as apprentice citizens. Instead children are human beings in their own right rather than human 'becomings'. Participation and making a fuller contribution to the communities in which they live, are thwarted by social systems which attempt to control and socialise young people until they are deemed mature enough to engage with the community at large (Matthews 2001). Rights and responsibilities of citizenship are still denied to them in quite arbitrary ways.

Among the actions denied to young people are participation in public decision making (via the election of political leaders), the shaping of the physical context of their environment and commenting on the services that they receive from the state. Sociological theorising has, however, helped create a space in public discourse that allows arguments for young people's inclusion that challenge the status quo of western societies. Participation in community affairs brings children and young people out of the closed, private world of the family home to engage with all other age groups in public life. The public discourse is set against a background of the developments of specific rights for children (defined by the United Nations as all those under eighteen years of age). This part of the chapter describes the citizenship/rights discourse as it relates to children and young people.

2.3.3   Citizenship and human rights

Rights are developed as attributes of citizenship with the emergence of the state. Accordingly, rights are usually discussed in relation to the paradigm of citizenship. Historically, powerful members of city states had rights to rule and privileges within society that were balanced against responsibilities to defend the state from threat. Whilst rights and responsibilities have become more extensive and have come to be shared between wider groups in particular states, membership of the state in the form of citizenship has remained an essential requirement for having rights. Only over the last half century have rights extended beyond the individual within a state to

individuals as part of the world population independent of their nationality. This is the concept of human rights.

Rights have been institutionalised in western nation states for a considerable time. Enlightenment philosophers, most notably Locke (1632-1702), propounded the idea that citizens have rights to life, liberty and property within (and protected by law) sovereign nation states. This set of specific rights was used later by the French Republic and the newly formed United States of America as the basis for their written constitutions (Plant 1997).

Rights as set entitlements balanced by duties to a particular state within a citizenship paradigm dominated political thinking until the twentieth century. National citizenship or the relationship an individual has with a particular state was defined in terms of the inclusion of those with particular attributes, such as age, gender or parentage and exclusion of those who did not meet specific requirements. The rights and obligations changed over time. An evolutionary account of the spread was developed in the influential work of T. H. Marshall. He argued that the eighteenth century witnessed the development of legal rights, followed by political rights in the nineteenth century and social rights in the last century.

T. H. Marshall (1963) provided the most influential theory of citizenship found in English social policy studies. An academic working at the London School of Economics, he produced an evolutionary theory in which certain types of rights were granted to British citizens at different periods of history. He identified legal, political and social rights, which evolved during the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The development of the welfare state after the Second World War added entitlements to social welfare to equality before the law and equal opportunity to vote and stand for political office. Marshall argued that the collective welfare state was the culmination in the development of British society that ensured every citizen's equal status by redressing the inequalities of a socially divisive class system.

Children have been excluded from full citizenship in the Marshallian discourse; age precluded access to legal redress and access to the political system whilst participation in the welfare state came through the parental, usually male, breadwinner. Children's rights did not become an issue until rights transcended the nation state to become universal after the Second World War (1939-1945).

The concept of human rights, that is rights that operate independently of a particular state and that apply to all human beings whatever their citizenship, was developed following the brutal treatment of minority groups who had their rights overridden in fascist states. The community of world nations, working together as the United Nations, sought to prevent future abuses and produced a charter – The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) – which identified the basic standards of treatment that everyone, whatever their country of origin or citizenship, should expect. The declaration made it clear that people should be respected because they are people, rather than because they belong to a particular group inside a national boundary. This universal declaration signalled a shift from the concept of the individual who had rights to personal freedoms protected by the state (negative rights) and rights to social provision (positive rights) in a state, to the concept of universal standards of treatment that apply to all human beings. However, universal rights while providing a benchmark for behaviour by the state and a moral framework to challenge oppression are operationalised by the state or collection of states within which an individual lives.

2.3.4 Consequences of specific rights for children

Marshallian social citizenship has been especially influential in the late twentieth century, but has predominantly been concerned with adults. The development of particular rights for children and young people is part of a wider questioning of rights within the welfare state which seeks to empower people even if they are not politically enfranchised or do not participate in the political process. Thus young people are a group who have rights even though they are not politically enfranchised.

The ages at which children acquire rights and responsibilities vary enormously as a result of historical accident. The age of criminal responsibility is ten years, the transition from school to work can take place at sixteen years of age, as can the right to marry with parental consent, the legal age for driving a car is seventeen years and the right to vote is granted at eighteen (Franklin 1995). However, in Marshallian terms political enfranchisement at age eighteen years marks their reaching full citizenship. Until they reach eighteen, young people are citizens in waiting, in the same way that women were until and beyond their enfranchisement. This exclusion is total from access to the determination of need.

The universal and international dimension to children's rights can be traced back to the establishment of the 'Save the Children Fund' in 1919 by Eglantyne Jebb. Jebb was motivated by the suffering of children in Europe in World War I (1914-1918). The Fund drafted a 'Declaration on the Rights of the Child' which was adopted by The League of Nations in 1924 and was subsequently developed by the United Nations and is the basis for the UNCRC (1989) (Hill and Tisdall 1997). The UNCRC also represents a specific case of the principles set out earlier in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948. While not legally enforceable in nation states, the UNCRC has been ratified by many countries around the world (only the USA and Somalia have failed to ratify it) and is intended to be the underlying principle driving their laws and policies relating to children and young people. The UNCRC carries the moral authority of a shared set of values and outlines the universal expectations of protection, provision of services and participation in decisions for all children under the age of eighteen years (a child as defined by the United Nations).

The UNCRC has been the focus for an active debate about what rights children and young people have, and how they operate in society. Although the convention covers many aspects of their lives, its direct relevance to this study lies in its participative article – Article 12 of the Convention – that states:

1. States parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, whether directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

The United Kingdom ratified this convention in 1991. By so doing the government declared its intention to make UK law, policy and practice compatible with the principles and standards of the Convention. Of the 54 Articles in the Convention, 40 ascribed direct rights to people less than eighteen years of age. These can be broadly separated into three types of rights, although there is considerable overlap between each category: participation rights [including Article 12], protection rights and provision rights (Willow 1997).

A version of the UNCRC produced by children for children, 'Know Your Rights!', explains Article 12 in direct terms, "Whenever adults make a decision that will affect you in any way, you have the right to give your opinion, and the adults have to take that seriously" (Nurnberg 1995 p.16).

The extension of rights arising from the endorsement of the principles of UNCRC takes young people further along the path to full citizenship and can potentially increase their power to shape society. Thus there are emerging institutional arrangements that, alongside the 'new sociology of childhood', challenge the traditional view that children and young people are non-citizens or citizens by proxy (Jones and Wallace 1992; Oliver and Heater 1994; Lister 1997). In any event, every young person as they grow older is moving towards the acquisition of adult citizenship rights and responsibilities that they acquire in a piecemeal, haphazard fashion (Franklin 1986, 1995).

Despite the changed status of children giving them moral and political entitlement to fair and equitable treatment, there is a gap between the rhetoric of rights and the reality of children's position in society. The new sociology of childhood has repositioned children in ways that are not universally socially accepted. The UNCRC has not been adopted as British law and young people are excluded from a wide range of public decision making or are present only as tokens (Matthews 2001). The UNCRC advocates specific rights for children – but society has yet to fully accept and uphold these rights (Lansdown 1995). This represents a significant dissonance in relation to this study's central concern with children and young people's participation in state welfare policy and decision-making, an arena where there is clear scope for the exercise of rights.

2.4   Frameworks for Participation

Human rights as outlined in the UNCRC establish principles for children's rights which they should have as citizens. The UNCRC provides a comprehensive framework of rights to participation, provision and protection. Many rights, particularly those relating to protection, have been adopted directly in childcare legislation but the full range of rights prescribed in the UNCRC has yet to be applied systematically. They bear a close examination (Box 2.2).

Box 2.2 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: summary of provisions

Participation rights

Children have the right to:

non-discrimination (Article 2)

a name and nationality (Article 7)

express an opinion and have that opinion taken into account in any matter affecting them (Article 12)

freedom of expression (Article 13)

freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Article 14)

freedom of association and assembly (Article 15)

privacy (Article 16)

access to appropriate information (Article 17)

education for responsible citizenship (Article 29)

enjoy their culture, religion and use their own language (Article 30)

Protection rights

Children have the right to:

their best interest being taken into account in all actions concerning the child (Article 3)

survival and development (Article 6) and preservation of identity (Article 8)

live with their parents (Article 9)

protection from abuse and neglect (Article 19)

special protection if deprived of their family environment (Articles 20 and 21)

special protection if they are refugees (Article 22)

periodic review of their care if they live away from home (Article 25)

school discipline that respects their dignity (Article 28)

protection from economic exploitation (Article 32) drug misuse (Article 33) and sexual exploitation (Article 34)

protection from sale, trafficking and abduction (Article 35), torture and deprivation of liberty (Article 37) and other exploitation (Article 36)

protection and care at times of armed conflict (Article 38)

respect for their human rights in the administration of juvenile justice (Article 40)

Provision rights

Children have the right to:

special care, education and training if they are disabled to ensure their full integration into society (Article 23)

health and health services (Article 24)

social security (Article 26)

an adequate standard of living (Article 27)

education (Articles 28 and 29)

leisure, recreation and cultural activities (Article 31)

rehabilitative care when subject to torture, neglect, maltreatment or exploitation (Article 39)

(Matthews 2001 p.13)

The UNCRC contains contradictions that are inherent in any rights based approach to issues of governance. Fox Harding (1996, 1997) examines how the development of specific rights for children have affected social work services and notes a difficulty that children's rights share with rights in general, namely, that one right may conflict with another. Rights to self-determination may clash with rights to protection, raising implications for the scope of participation when the right to protection from harm potentially clash with rights to participate in decision making. In child protection, for instance, the desire of professionals to remove a child from an abusive situation may clash with the child's desire to remain in familiar surroundings. The right to a say in decision making may be overridden by the adult's legal duty to protect the child. Recent cases where young people's refusal to consent to medical treatment have been overridden in legal judgements, have demonstrated the courts' view that young people should be protected from their own lack of experience or failure to consider the long-term consequences of such a decision to refuse treatment (Boseley and Dyer 1999; Freeman 2000).

This conflict between young people's wishes and their best interests, as perceived by adults, is discussed by Thomas and O'Kane (1998). They conclude that protective measures are a two-edged device. While they may protect the welfare of the young they also define them as a separate, non-adult population whose rights may be dependent on the context in which they operate.

2.4.1   Influence of the children's rights movement

The UNCRC gives children and young people rights to participate in decisions that affect them, to the provision of services that they need and the right to protection from the physical and moral dangers they can face in wider society and when societies or cultures engage in conflict. The convention underpins much of the case advanced by the children's rights movement. Proponents of children's rights argue that adults have the obligation to uphold children's rights (Lansdown 1995; Hart 1997). However, rights in a social setting such as the model of citizenship defined

by Marshall, are generally balanced with responsibilities to the community within which an individual lives. Children's rights, therefore, are not operating in exactly the same way as full citizenship rights. Young people are seen as different to adults because they have different rights, especially those concerned with protection. It may be argued a rights-like equality before the law cannot be abrogated if a citizen fails to meet their obligations. Young people are denied some social rights (e.g. to unemployment benefit if they fail to attend particular interviews or training) but their right to protection resembles a legal right.

There are arguments for and against specific rights for children and young people. Those promoting rights such as Holt (1975), Franklin (1986, 1995), Lansdown (1995) and Hart (1997), argue that a clear framework of expectations will lead to a recognition of children as independent actors who deserve respect as human beings and services to meet their needs. Rights will lead to their fair treatment in society and their recognition as complete individuals.

Those who question the benefits of specific rights such as Fox Harding (1996, 1997), Burrows (1998) and Cooper (1998) argue that the UNCRC gives children and young people too much power in settings such as the home, school and the care system. Rights may be corrosive to family life because they alter the traditional power balance or cultural norms that govern relationships and produce stability between the generations. More generally, Etzioni (1993, 1997) expresses concerns that the pursuit of a rights-based culture will produce a self-centred or 'me first' society where the pursuit of individual need outweighs the considerations of other individuals and the community at large: in essence, a breakdown in the co-operative fabric of communities. Children are usually subordinate to adults in such a communitarian discourse.

Goodwin-Gill (1997) has urged a lowering of the age of voting using the UNCRC as the basis for such claims. Few authors who espouse the cause of increased rights for children discuss any responsibilities that could appropriately sit alongside such developments, and the UNCRC is framed

on the understanding that adults carry responsibility to provide for the needs of children. Paul Boateng, a former Minister for Children, suggests, "Young people's rights are to be matched by their responsibilities" (Boateng 1997, p.2). These he delineates as aspects of control of interest within adult constructions of childhood avoiding anti-social and criminal behaviour. Child liberationists such as Holt (1975), Franklin (1986, 1995) and Lansdown (1995) argue that children are rational actors who have a right to be involved in decisions about all aspects of their lives. It is argued by these authors and others such as Hodgkin and Newell (1996), West (1996) and Goodwin-Gill (1997) that their involvement will improve their position and treatment in society, improve education and reduce the scandal of institutionalised abuse emerging from the residential child care sector (Utting 1997), at the same time increasing their skills of participation and ability to engage in the democratic process. Broadly, childcare professionals have used the idea of children's rights to promote better conditions for children and young people and empower them in decision-making forums. These moves have tended to be opposed by those groups who support the sanctity of the family as the social unit most effective in ensuring the best possible treatment for children and who see children's rights as corrosive to family and community relationships.

The force of the child liberationist or children's rights movement is that statutory rights will mean children and young people who have been marginalised or abused will have a legal mechanism and moral authority to challenge policy that undermines their interest. Rights rather than state philanthropy are proposed as the means of producing social justice for all children and specific social rights are the basis of demands for adequate service provision. The Children Act 1989 gave children the ability to commence legal proceedings in their own right, and recent court cases have been used to try and force education authorities to improve material conditions and to challenge planning authority decisions to build on areas used by children for recreation.

2.4.2   Children and young people as citizens

Children are independent social actors with the competence to participate in decisions that affect them (Lansdown 1995). However, legislation and government structures have lagged behind children's social repositioning. Changes are taking place to include them in formal decision-making and politics as Hill and Tisdall (1997) have noted:

> *… government structures may indeed provide more effective policies for children and may truly enhance and support children's rights. But they largely leave with adults the power to recognise rights, the power to make decisions, the power of discretion. Children would not have full civil or political rights. Without these rights can children truly be considered 'citizens'? (p. 259)*

Children are not citizens in Marshall's terms until they reach eighteen years and have the right to vote. However his model is not the only way of viewing an individual's relationship with the state. Their rights to participate, social rights to services and protection, and rights to residence are all significant components of the concept of social citizenship and yet there is ambivalence about their full participation while they are perceived as a social group in need of protection. Both the UNCRC and the Children Act 1989 emphasise vulnerability. Children's rights to participate are, therefore, under developed at the present time.

The transition to full citizenship is a terrain that authors such as Jones and Wallace (1992), Coles (1995, 1997, 1998, 2000), France (1996, 1998) and France *et al*. (2000) have been exploring. They look at young people's transitions through education into work, family life and independence, and reach conclusions as to the effect of various government policies. They find that these transitions have become more protracted and precarious for young people as a whole and poor young people in particular. The lengthy period of Conservative administration that ended in 1997 was responsible for withdrawing state support to young people and raising expectations about their behaviour, with increased sanctions if they failed to attain these higher requirements. Present government policies stress the need for social inclusion but it is not yet clear if they will lead to a paternalistic view that

develops mechanisms to listen to young people but keeps decision-making for adults, or whether power will be shared with young people.

2.5 Policy and Practice

The citizenship and rights discourse raises direct implications for policy and practice in childcare. "Throughout history, different peoples in different places have adopted special policies to deal with the problem of children who, for some reason, have been separated from their families" (Casas 1995 p.15). Public concern with childcare emerged with the construction of the child as an identifiable individual understood in relation to adult others (Aries 1962; Hendrick 1994; Anderson 1995). The policy discourse which created childcare legislation in Britain dealt primarily with deprived children in the working classes, assuaging religious and philanthropic concerns by instituting systems of control which removed young people from natural families or provided substitutes where there were no families (Frost and Stein 1989). This process created a tension between protection and control in the English child welfare system which persists even in the modern context where there has been a resurgence of regard for natural families (Hendrick 1994). The policy context can be best understood through a brief outline of the development of English state childcare and the changes in legislation that have led to increased participation of children and young people in statutory social work decision making.

2.5.1 Legislative development in childcare

Hendrick (1994) distils the development of state regulated substitute childcare as part of the transition to a modern industrial society. He identifies four related themes, which together explain the emergence of universal and interventionist childcare legislation. Hendrick describes the gradual shift away from an idea of childhood fragmented by geography (urban/rural) and by class life experiences, to one that was much more uniform and coherent. The rise and development of the 'domestic ideal' amongst the early nineteenth century middle class which helped to present the family as the principal institutional influence is also delineated, as is the evolution of the legal relationship between the state and welfare services.

The political and cultural struggle to extend the concept of childhood through all social classes and to universalise it is the final strand of Hendrick's exposition.

Fox Harding (1997) develops a more complex typography of childcare sub-systems based on historical experience. She posits four models that demonstrate how political and professional changes shape childcare, culminating in children's rights and child liberation perspectives. Fox Harding's models are not mutually exclusive nor are they descriptions of a chronological change. They actively context the area of childcare legislation and will be familiar to childcare policy makers and practitioners.

The **laissez-faire and patriarchy** perspective is broadly identified with the nineteenth century but has enjoyed some renaissance in the late twentieth century. It is essentially the view that power in the family should not be disturbed except in very extreme circumstances, and the role of the state should be a minimal one.

The **state paternalism and child protection** perspective may be associated with the growth of state intervention in welfare in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Here extensive state intervention to protect and care for children is legitimated, but state intervention itself may be authoritarian and biological family bonds undervalued. Good quality substitute care is favoured when the care of the biological parents is found to be inadequate.

The **modern defence of the birth family and parents' rights** perspective may be associated more with the expansion of Welfare States in the post-Second World War period. It is to be distinguished from laissez-faire in that state intervention is legitimated, but this intervention is seen as ideally of a supportive kind, helping to defend and preserve birth families. Poorer and socially deprived parents are seen as victims of heavy- handed state action, rather than - as they should be - objects of help and support.

The **children's rights and child liberation** perspective, certainly in its extreme form, is more marginal to law and policy, but has been influential

in some times and places and is apparently becoming increasingly so in the last decade of the twentieth century. The perspective advocates the child as a subject, as an independent person with rights, which at the extreme are similar to the rights of the adult. Children are to be freed from adult oppression by being granted more adult status.

(Fox Harding 1997)

2.5.2   The legal framework

The origins of English child care law can be traced back to the Elizabethan Poor Law Act of 1601, but its modern origins lie, as with much of modern welfare, with the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. The adjustment of the state to the demands of modern industrial society, which this marked, led to a series of laws dealing with children and the provision of substitute families. Since the Second World War (1939-1945) there have been major codifications of childcare law which have been accompanied by structural and practice change. The Curtis Report (1945) on the murder of a fostered child by the foster parents, led directly to the Children Act 1948 and to the setting up of local authority children's departments whose role was to co-ordinate childcare work (Packman 1975; Hayden *et al.* 1999). Children's departments were of mixed quality and the Seebohm Report of 1968 recommended their replacement by generic social services departments to better meet the needs of families. Enacted through the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970, these developments were later criticised because communication and co-operation within social services and other agencies became more complex and childcare was practised by non-specialist workers. As early as 1973 the Maria Caldwell Report highlighted these as contributory factors in Maria's death (Packman 1975; Hall 1980).

Arguably it was not until the Children Act 1975 that the young person was first regarded as an individual with wishes that should be taken into account. The Act brought a strengthening of long-term fostering in the child's interest. Children's rights, in the sense that they are considered here, were first explicitly recognised in the most recent legislation and guidance, the Children Act 1989.

The Children Act (1989) revised existing legislation, reinforcing the concept of the child in need, parental partnership and the paramount interest of the child. It was heavily influenced by the development of children's rights in the UNCRC. It legitimised the right of children and young people to participate in formal decision making. In particular, Section 22 of the Act lists the child as the first person to be consulted in decision-making and Section 26 has specific instructions for local authorities to provide consultation procedures for young people. As well as drawing on rights discussions and anticipating the UNCRC, these expectations were predicated on recommendations from the Howe Inquiry in 1992 which called for a 'code of rights' for young people in residential care (Hayden *et al.* 1999). While the practice of participation is still developing in social work, it has produced a genuine commitment by social services departments to work in partnership with young people (Sinclair 1998).

Earlier, during the 1970s, the high profile enquiries into child abuse led to a shift in focus to a more rights-based approach to social work rather than the emphasis on welfare that had failed to protect children from abuse. By the end of that decade, there was a loss of public confidence in social workers' abilities to prevent abuse which coincided with the United Nations 'Year of the Child' in 1979 and the concomitant interest in rights that the year of action fostered. These experiences subsequently influenced the Children Act 1989. Legislation in the late twentieth century has moved towards the children's rights and child liberation model described by Fox Harding in which the child is regarded as an independent person with rights to protection and services that are intended to free them from adult oppression or mistreatment. The right to participate is emphasised in the Children Act 1989 (see Box 2.3).

Box 2.3 The Children Act 1989: participation in the work of social services

The Act states that for children looked after by local authorities:

Before making any decision with respect to a child whom they are looking after, or proposing to look after, a local authority shall, so far as is reasonably practicable, ascertain the wishes and feelings of -

(a)   the child

(b)   his parents

(c)   any person who is not a parent of his but has parental responsibility for him; and

(d)   any other person whose wishes and feelings the authority consider to be relevant, regarding the matter to be decided.

In making any such decision a local authority shall give due consideration-

(a)   having regard to his age and understanding, to such wishes and feelings of the child as they have been able to ascertain….

(DoH 1989 p. 1863-4)

The Act also sought to emphasise the partnership approach to protecting and caring for young people in difficulties. The ensuing emphasis on keeping them in touch with their families is illustrated by the change in the terms used to describe young people cared for by the state.

With the implementation in 1991 of the Children Act 1989 the terminology changed from children 'in care' to children 'looked after' by local authorities.   This inelegant phrase was designed to emphasise continuing parental responsibility for children whom the local authority was 'looking after', and to avoid the stigma said to be associated with a child in care.

(Hallett 1998 p.236)

The Act has been developed in practice through the production of guidance for social services departments, notably 'Looking After Children: Good Parenting, Good Outcomes. Detailed by Ward (1995) the guidance includes methods of recording and reviewing individual cases which provide the opportunity to engage children in their own care plans. Such practice guidelines indicate government commitment to further the UNCRC, in particular the regular review of placements (Article 25). Despite the advent of the UNCRC and the Children Act, the 1980s and 1990s saw revelations about the failure of the state to provide protection to young people living in substitute care.   Scandals concerning abuse in residential homes led to 'People Like Us', reporting an enquiry led by Sir William Utting (1997). His wide-ranging review of the state of childcare prompted the convening of a task force of ministers across ten government departments and the launch of Quality Protects in 1998.   Although dealing principally with children's rights to protection and provision of service, Quality Protects advances children's participation on a broad front.

The participation rights of the UNCRC have created the expectation that the state should listen to children, but it was the realisation that standards were not being upheld which led to concrete action and an obligation on all local authorities to have measures in place that enable young people to participate in all aspects of services provided for them. Quality Protects has become the major government initiative driving young people's participation in social services policy and planning, and builds on the earlier developments of specific rights to be heard in case decisions and living environments outlined in the 1989 Act. Quality Protects is a major programme to transform the public care system in England and Wales. It provides a substantial new children's services special grant of £380 million over three

and a half years initially. It aims to promote the voice of those in care and those formerly in care *(Hayden* et al. *1999).*

The Quality Protects initiative has now been extended beyond its initial three years and continues to demonstrate the extent to which a rights focus has influenced policy on state childcare. Quality Protects is a management initiative that seeks to uphold rights to provision of service, protection from abuse in substitute care and participation in case and policy decisions. These rights are balanced by expectations discussed by Boateng when he was at the Department of Health and a minister who was involved with policy on young people's issues during the new Labour Government's first term in office:

> *Childhood is a precious place in which children have a right to grow and develop free from those who would prey upon and exploit them ..... [however] let me make it clear: criminal and anti-social behaviour will be punished, not excused. Young people's rights are to be matched by their responsibilities.*

(Boateng 1997 p.2)

Sentiments such as these suggest that the government is seeking to extend rights and introduce a balance between rights and responsibilities that reflects modern approaches to citizenship. The government recognises children and young people as citizens, but not the same type of citizen as adults. This diminished or youth citizenship, being citizens of the state without the full powers of adult citizens, emphasises protection and provision of service for those young people in need but stops short of adopting the UNCRC as law. Circumscribing the UNCRC effectively means that participation in general community decision making is not envisaged for children and young people and falls short of that for adults. Participation is promoted by the Children Act 1989 in relation to the level of service provision and personal care for young people looked after and they, unlike their peers in wider society have legal support for their involvement in formal decision making. The duty placed on adults to protect them and consider their best interest means that they can be overruled and their participation may therefore be no more than that of an apprentice citizen.

Therefore they are individuals or groups of individuals who are trying out the skills of participation under the protective supervision of adults.

The government's caution over children's citizenship rights may be judged in relation to the hopes of lobbying groups such as Save the Children (2001) that an independent Children's Commissioner would be appointed in England to promote the needs of children and influence all areas of government policy. These are yet to be fulfilled. While the devolved Welsh assembly has appointed a commissioner, the government has not yet committed itself to a strategy that places the needs and views of children at the heart of central government policy making (Matthews 2001). It does however recognise the need for co-ordinated approaches to the needs of particular groups and in July 2000 the Prime Minister established a new cabinet committee on Children and Young People's Services to co-ordinate policies with the aim of preventing poverty and underachievement among children and young people. A Children and Young People's Unit has been established in the Department for Education and Employment with a minister to oversee the co-ordination of strategy on vulnerable children and young people. Although these developments go some way towards fulfilling the government's duties to uphold the UNCRC, it is too early to judge what concrete changes in the lives of young people will flow from these initiatives. The initiatives came too late to be considered in the empirical section of this research.

2.5.3   Current structure

The extension of participation takes place within a legislative context that is flawed, that has seen extensive abuse of young people, and that has failed to hear their voices (Indman 1999). Although childcare is a state regulated activity, it has failed to meet all the needs of the children and young people it is designed to serve (Utting 1997). The problems in childcare have been attributed to both care-giving and organisational failure in a number of contexts: substitute care, diverse populations of looked after children, abuse and organisational failure in residential care, and children and young people's lack of power. Each of these contexts is now discussed in turn.

Substitute care

The population of children and young people who inhabit residential and fostering services has changed since the 1948 Children Act came into force. Negative effects of separation on young children were detailed by Bowlby (1965, 1975) and poor substitute parenting provided by some host families meant that child care policy changed from support for institutional and foster care outside of the family to one in which the state tried to support families through their own difficult circumstances, rather than receive children into care. Reception into care is now seen as a last resort, not just on behalf of the family, but also of the professionals whose job is to support them (Marshall 1975; Hellinckx and Van Den Bruel 1995).

There is a division between the ages of children who end up in the two types of care on offer: fostering or residential care (MacDonald 1997). Younger children are fostered whilst those who are presenting more problematic behaviour or who are older and are more difficult to place are housed in the residential sector. Since the Children and Young Persons Act 1969, the distinction between the supposed depraved and deprived have been blurred; those who have committed offences can share residential accommodation with those who are looked after for welfare needs, or who may have suffered substitute family placement breakdowns. These changes mean that a smaller residential sector, that is often staffed by young, inexperienced workers who are isolated and receive low salaries, tries to address the needs of the most troubled and vulnerable young people in society (Colton and Hellinckx 1993).

Diverse populations of young people looked after

Bebbington and Miles (1989) examined the backgrounds of 2,500 children admitted to care in England. They found that, whilst children from particular ethnic minorities do not seem specifically vulnerable, children of mixed race were. Work by Barn (1993) and Barn *et al.* (1997) highlights the over representation of black children in a care system that is not equipped to cater for their specific needs. Social policy theory has moved in the direction of diverse provision of services for an increasingly diverse population, and institutional care by its very nature struggles to reflect this. Although there

have been significant improvements in recent years in social work provision for black children and families as a whole (Barn *et al*. 1997), there remains a need for better ethnic monitoring, clear policies to address equality of opportunity and increased training and resource provision so that social services can meet the individual needs of black children. Examples of work to address these issues in residential provision such as the Bibini Centre in Manchester (First Key 1996), where black young people help design their own residential services, are few and far between.

Abuse and organisational failure in residential care

For many years, public care was viewed as a philanthropic activity, with child-saving movements epitomised by the work of Barnardo's and the National Children's Home held in high regard. However, significant blemishes exist on the landscape of care. For example, a number of cases have come to light where members of the clergy and formerly respected childcare professionals have been exposed as child abusers who have pursued over many years the physical and sexual abuse of children in their care. The recent conviction of a Roman Catholic priest, now in his 70s, for a catalogue of sexual crimes going back to the 1950s that were perpetrated in a Father Hudson's Home in Birmingham is a good example of this phenomenon (Dutter 1998), as was the case of the Paedophile Information Exchange run by Peter Righton, a prominent establishment figure. More recent examples include the North Wales children's homes revelations (Waterhouse 2000), where it is now acknowledged that wide scale sexual abuse was perpetrated by a group of paedophiles who included powerful respected figures in local and national society (Davies 1998; Dobson 1998). Similar scandals have been unearthed in Leicestershire and Cambridgeshire, and will no doubt be joined by others when victims of abuse become empowered by the experiences of others to report their own violations (Brindle 1998). The ability of paedophiles to gain employment and therefore power over vulnerable children has been enabled by three factors: first, their own plausibility; second, the location of the work in isolated units; and third, inconsistent selection, vetting and recruitment procedures where departments fail to scrutinise carefully enough the experiences and credentials of the staff which they employ (Smith 1999).

Organisational factors have also allowed the systematic abuse of children to be perpetrated by their publicly sanctioned substitute parents. The 'Pindown Experience' described by the Child Care Inquiry (Levy and Kahan 1991) illustrates in great detail how one charismatic social services employee, who was acknowledged to be misguided rather than malevolent, was able to institute and perpetrate a regime that humiliated and incarcerated young people in the belief that it would improve their patterns of behaviour (Butler and Williamson 1994). The real failure illustrated by this example is an organisational one. A poorly equipped service was charged with dealing with young people whose troubled backgrounds produced problematic behaviours that workers were not trained, supervised or supported sufficiently to deal with. Managers and local politicians turned a blind eye to bad practice as long as staff 'produced the goods' and kept control (Levy and Kahan 1991). It was contact with an outside legal representative rather than any welfare checks and balances that brought the situation to wider public scrutiny, resulting in organisational change.

Children and young people's lack of power

What is striking from these examples is that the victims of the abuse have either felt unable to complain about their treatment, or been disbelieved when they have done so. Those charged with their care and protection have failed in the most direct way possible in the duties that society paid them to uphold and wider society has not to have either been interested or been able to believe that such things could happen. The key is the power disparity between those in care and those caring for them.

Work by Colton *et al*. (1997) and Lindsay (1998) points out the stigma still attached to those who receive childcare services. Young people report discrimination in their social and educational experiences.

> *The prime purpose of the various lobbying groups in the leaving care field has been to improve the lot of the young people in care in order that they are no longer being abused, or perceived as victims or as a 'problem'*

(Broad 1998 p.57).

This view of young people as objects rather than participants in a process undermines any influence they can affect and the way that wider society views them is even now an important factor in the treatment they receive. Research evidence is being used to try and change policy that can address the failings that public parenting exhibits. Two main approaches are being utilised in child-care to redress the balance of power in young people's favour. First, the approach of the Children's Rights movement who promote a legalistic strategy for the upholding of certain basic rights that underpin the treatment of all children and should be especially relevant for those who are most vulnerable. However, this strategy still relies on adults to intercede on behalf of young people and these adults are susceptible to the organisational power politics that operate in bureaucratic and legal organisations (Parton 1996). Second, a consumer or user focus is gaining momentum where, as with adult service users, power is shifted towards consumers from providers of service (Hallett 1998). The difficulty here comes down to the transient nature of childhood. Consumers need the information, experience and networks of full citizens to make choices coupled with the ability to exit services for more appropriate ones if they are to exert any meaningful influence. Such choices are not available to young people at present.

These five contexts of are of central concern to the new Labour government's Quality Protects initiative. The new Labour government elected in 1997 gave manifesto commitments to address poverty, in particular child poverty. The general heading of 'social exclusion' was used to describe those members of communities who are excluded from an acceptable level of social functioning. Young people cared for by local authorities were seen to be significant among those excluded from the benefits of belonging to wider society. The Utting Report (1997) in particular painted a bleak picture of state child care, and its seeming inability to protect young people in the care system from abuse either in or outside public care.

The government has identified the following seven problems in child welfare services. Children have not been securely attached to carers capable of providing safe and effective care for the duration of childhood. They have not been protected effectively from emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect. Children in need, or looked after, have not gained maximum life chance benefits from educational opportunities, health care and social care. Young people leaving care have been isolated and been unable to participate socially and economically as citizens. Children with specific social needs arising out of disability or a health condition are not having their needs adequately met or reviewed. Assessment procedures have failed to differentiate between different types and levels of need and produced a timely service response. Departments have failed to ensure that resources are planned and provided at levels which represent best value for money and allow choice for different responses for different needs and circumstances. (Children's Legal Centre, 1998)

Quality Protects was introduced by the government as part of the strategy of addressing social exclusion and its programme of 'Modernising Social Services', and is designed to address the above issues. Launched in 1998, it aimed to transform the management and delivery of children's social services. Frank Dobson, Secretary of State at the Department of Health at that time, identified Quality Protects as a major extension of central control through targeting and standard-setting, with the pill sweetened for local authorities by the promise of extra resources to pump prime the improved standards of service to be delivered. As part of the initiative each social services department was required to provide mechanisms for hearing the views of children and young people about the services they receive.

Quality Protects- Young People's Participation

Objective 8: actively to involve users and carers in planning services and in tailoring individual packages of care; and to ensure effective mechanisms are in place to handle complaints.

Sub-Objective 8.1: to demonstrate that the views of children and families are actively sought and used in the planning, delivery and review of services.

Sinclair and Franklin (2000 p.1).

In 1999 John Hutton, Health Minister said:

It is imperative to absorb children's own views into the Quality Protects programme which centres on children as part of our community most affected by social exclusion…Children want and need to have a voice. They demand and have a right to have a say in all the decisions taken about them.

(Hutton 1999)

In the Children Act Report (DoH 2000) the government sets clear expectations for young people's participation:

Promoting children's participation is an important theme underpinning the Children Act and given further emphasis in Quality Protects. Its importance arises because children have too often been marginalised, or completely excluded, where key decisions are being made about their future. Children's ability to offer constructive comment on their experiences of the services they receive and how such services might be improved has been under-valued and under-used… Local authorities need to demonstrate that children's views are reflected in planning, monitoring and evaluating children's services… Subsequent Children Act reports will comment in more depth on local authorities' performance in promoting children's participation

(DoH 2000 p.7)

These remarks provide clear evidence that children's rights to participate in all decisions that affect them is a significant factor in government policy and is shaping services for children and young people. Prior to the implementation of Quality Protects each social services department was required to produce plans that showed how they intended to meet the targets set for them by central government. The large children's charities offered advice on how to compile these plans and working parties convened by central government are scrutinizing the proposals to identify areas of best

practice that can be shared with all authorities. Young people's participation is one of the areas being studied and the Department of Health has now produced research in practice briefings to help local authorities improve practice (Sinclair and Franklin 2000).

In essence, Quality Protects is a strategic management tool that uses a systems approach to improve the quality of children's services. Local authorities have audited their services and mapped the needs of young people in their area. The audit is used as the basis for inspection and monitoring and the government hopes that these measures will improve the quality of service delivered to young people. Quality Protects also gives elected members a new and enhanced role as corporate parents with a duty to ensure that each authority is a 'good parent' to the young people it looks after. Members are expected to be pro-active in finding out how young people are being treated and ensuring that services match government expectations. Authorities are expected to co-ordinate services across functional divides such as social services, health, housing, education and leisure in order to operationalise the concept of 'corporate parenting'. This means that young people are no longer solely the responsibility of social service departments but that all parts of the local state should look to providing the best levels of service and protection.

Whilst there are other government initiatives which aim to improve children's lives and reduce the damaging effects of social exclusion, for example Children's Fund, Sure Start, the New Deal for Young People and the Childcare Strategy, Quality Protects targets young people looked after. It has a clear expectation that this particular group of young people will participate in all aspects of their individual case planning and wider service developments. None of the other initiatives focus this clearly on young people looked after, or focus exclusively on the organisational performance of social services departments. It therefore fits the remit of this research and offers opportunities to observe developments in participation for young people looked after.

2.5.4   Increasing participation of social service users

Following the post war expansion of state controlled welfare services during the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s, the relationship between social services departments and people who use their services have changed. During the 1980s and 1990s governments have legislated to limit the power of professionals to make decisions about individual need and make services more responsive to service users. These changes were part of wider social policy developments introduced by the Conservative government of the 1980s. Internal or quasi- markets were introduced to health and welfare services to produce competition between service providers and drive down the cost of care using market forces, while at the same time increasing consumer choice of service provision (Leach *et al*. 1994; Clarke 1996). In state welfare these developments were demonstrated by the introduction of internal markets to the National Health Service and the implementation of the Community Care Act 1990 (Alcock 1996). Although directly attributable to government ideology of that time that embraced the ideas of the free market and used the ideas of Hayek (1944), these developments ran in parallel with the development of service user movements, most notably groups of disabled people and mental health survivors who challenged paternalistic welfare practices to influence provision and fit the models of disadvantage that they developed (Oliver 1990; Croft and Beresford 1992; Barnes 1997; Oliver and Barnes 1998; Barnes and Warren 1999).

The view of the young person as customer or consumer of service is being developed (Hoggett 1996; Culter and Waine 1994; Clarke 1996). The new shape of public services derived from commercial business practices is under-explored from young people's perspectives. Braye and Preston-Shoot (1994) examine the power balance operating within these developing relationships as a whole and conclude that although superficially the user of service is able to control more than in the past, empowerment happens not just because powerful people give away power, but because oppressed people engage in wresting it away from them. In the setting of public care young people start with a great disadvantage; they rarely get the chance to collect together in a group of sufficient size to generate the understanding of

their own position or develop strategies to empower themselves (Runciman 1972).

2.5.5   The impact of managerialism on the delivery of welfare services

Government initiatives that seek to improve services for children and young people, such as Quality Protects and Best Value, are management-led. Setting targets and measuring outcomes are used as a means of producing change. Therefore social work managers are key agents in this process and their raison d'être has been codified as 'managerialism' (Jones 1999). They are controlling agendas for change and facilitating developments in the social work task which include pursuit of the rights discourse in the Children Act 1989. This section explores the nature and source of managers' power in order to understand how they approach their task and how this may effect the participation of young people.

Until the 1970s social work was controlled by professional self-regulation in which social work education was the setting for the selection of suitable professionals and their inculcation of social work values (Jones 1999). The ability of social workers to control the social work task changed with the election of the Conservative government in 1979. The 1980s and 1990s have seen the rise of management controls in the delivery of state run welfare services. As with other aspects of local government service provision, social services departments have been subject to the political recourse to management as the device which the government of the day hoped would rescue and revive the public sector as a whole (Pollit 1994). The election of the Thatcher government brought to an end the post war period of social democratic, bureaucratic paternalism and replaced it with the desire for dynamic, value-for-money public sector organisations. The Thatcher governments (1979-1990) introduced the internal market to social services provision and John Major's governments (1990-1997) highlighted the relationship that individuals have with providers of state services in The Citizens' Charter White Paper 1991. This was designed "to make public services answer better to the wishes of their users and to raise their quality overall" (Kerley 1994 p.156). The Charter has been referred to as "total

quality management for the public sector" (Kerley 1994 p.157). The 'right' of managers to manage and claim power in social work took place at this time when local government as a whole was being given less money and expected to do more with it. In common with other areas of government provision, social work services were put under pressure to change from bureaucratic, professionally dominated welfare providers, to responsive customer driven departments that would move service users away from dependence on the state. Local authorities were to pay more attention to the needs of service users rather than concentrate on the internal requirements and demands of the organisation (Kerley 1994).

In the new political climate managers are viewed as a social group with a particular ideology – managerialism – who have both social and organisational power. Although managerialism is seen to operate in different forms, Newman and Clarke (1994) identify two main types: Neo-Taylorism that focuses on control, efficiency and productivity; and New Managerialism which, under the influence of Peters and Warterman (1982) and Waterman (1994), is characterised by its people-centred, flexible approach to the pursuit of excellence and quality. Both styles of management co-exist in present day social work, where tight fiscal control and accountability within regulatory frameworks operate in settings where managers are asked to provide inspiration and leadership to smaller groups of workers who then pursue a vision outlined in a corporate mission statement and strive for quality in all aspects of their work. Quality Protects is an example of this approach to the effective and efficient delivery of high quality services to children and young people in need or looked after.

The pressure placed on local government services to respond to the needs of their service users and the development of managerialism in the public welfare have led to changes in the way that social work departments relate to the people who use their services. They are no longer viewed as clients of a professional service but have become customers or citizen service users. Managers are no longer supervisors of case work professionals who could advise qualified social workers on casework management but could not challenge the basis of a fellow professional's management of their own

cases. Instead, managers have become controllers of the social work task with direct lines of accountability for decisions taken and money spent. This accountability has been achieved by the implementation of tightly defined procedures for assessment and delivery of care within agency and national guidelines e.g. Looking After Children (Ward 1995) and Performance Assessment Frameworks (DoH 1999). Costs and outcomes of intervention are a major part of regulatory frameworks now used in social work and these can be compared within and between departments so that the most efficient and effective methods of intervention can be used in the services provided. While the two management styles coexist, there still remains a tension between service providers and the people who use services. The Citizens' Charter, with its focus on rights and clear expectations of service delivery, has not resolved the confusion as to whether people simply consume services, as the customers of a commercial enterprise would, or if they are citizens who have rights to services whether or not they can pay for such services or choose to use them.

Cooke (1992) outlines the differences between private sector and local authority services that show that social welfare delivered by the local state differs from purely business practice. In state welfare the customer does not necessarily buy the service but may have a right to receive it. The customer may be compelled to receive the service. However, customers may be refused the service because their needs may not meet conditions laid down. Such conditions of service are not only determined by the resources available but by the political process. Issues about rationing can arise and criteria may have to be laid down not made by decisions subject to the market but subject to the political process. The customer influences that process as a citizen.

These differences highlight how users of service are both consumers and citizens and effect different influence depending upon the role that they play. For children and young people they may consume services but, as has been discussed, they have yet to attain the full rights of citizenship and consequently have less power to influence service provision.

The pursuit of change by the application of management continued with the election of the New Labour government in 1997. Their Best Value initiative has encouraged local government to test their services by comparing, contrasting, consulting and competing to produce departments that listen to their users, learn from other areas and are efficient and effective. The White Paper 'Modernising Social Services Promoting Independence, Improving Protection, Raising Standards' sets out its principles which de-emphasize the status of the provider in favour of promoting independence and ensuring the delivery of quality services (DoH 1998a).

Social services have been targeted for special attention by the government because of their past failures to respond to the needs of people who rely on their services. They are now subject to regular external inspection and review by the Social Services Inspectorate and the Audit Commission who combine to carry out a rolling programme of inspections into the performance of individual departments. Their reports are available to the general public and league tables of performance are widely disseminated that show how well a department serves its local population and whether they use their resources in a systematic and efficient way. The New Labour Government's 'Modernising Social Services' (1998) legislation, which was part of a wider strategy to modernise local government to make it more responsive to the needs of citizens, uses management strategies to produce change that will be measured using criteria drawn up by central government. While the government provides the legislative and regulatory framework for social work, managers are the driving forces behind implementation at the point of service delivery. Management is the means by which central government intends to implement changes in the quality of welfare and managers' right to manage under the orthodoxy of managerialism is a defining component of the organization of social services departments.

2.6   Conclusions

This investigation is set against a background of developing rights for young people. Rights to protection, provision and participation are enshrined in the

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Their particular right to participate in decisions that affect them (Article 12) is used by lobbying organisations and state agencies as the basis for including young people in individual, community and governmental decision making. Sociologically, young people are now perceived to have moved from a position where they were viewed as a component in the family unit, to a more independent status with abilities to comment on and shape the world in which they live. In sociological terms they are perceived as moving beyond the structure of the family unit and exercising agency. This reassessment of their competence as apprentice citizens opens up the idea that there should be spaces for them to participate in decision making, as individuals or as part of a group of peers, rather than being solely subjects of adult decisions. While specific rights in British society are granted at different ages, childcare legislation is couched in terms of individual competence to understand situations and make decisions about them. The right to decide may still be overturned by the right to be protected, even if that means being protected from the consequences of a decision the young person has made, such as their own medical treatment or where and with whom they wish to live. The best interests of a young person may not always be seen by adults to be served by the decisions they would make for themselves. In adults, rights are balanced against responsibilities; for young people, rights are also balanced with responsible citizenship, but their right to protection is a further factor that limits their autonomy. The provision of rights for young people does not ensure clarity in their position, but they do provide a framework for discussion and a way of challenging oppression and changing the way they are treated.

The socially constructed nature of childhood and young adulthood means that this phase of a person's life varies over time and across cultural and societal boundaries. There is no one childhood common to all young people: it is a life phase that is characterised by diversity and reflects the differences found in the rest of the population. Universal basic rights operate in the wide range of social settings that young people inhabit and their particular situations and histories will shape their daily realities. Some young people make less successful transitions to adulthood than the general population

and young people looked after are over represented in this group. For them rights are a potential means of ensuring social justice by providing a legal and moral claim against the state for fair treatment and effective support.

The present government has recognised the past failure of state childcare to ensure effective protection and support. The Quality Protects initiative is its response to the shortcomings of a system that did not set itself high standards and which failed to act as a good parent to many of the vulnerable young people it had a duty to protect and help make successful transitions to independent adult life. In common with other areas of public service, social services departments are now expected to be more responsive to the needs of their customers, but how much power service users have to shape the services they receive is still open to debate. Young people who rely on social services do not have independent financial means and have little effective choice in who provides the services they need. This means that they have little chance of exercising real power in a consumerist paradigm if they have no exit from state provision or the means to make service providers accountable to them.

While managers in the public sector may embrace the rhetoric of service user power, the rise of managerialism means that their control over services remains strong. This review of the literature has not found any proposed models for young people's participation in the planning of statutory social work services that would ensure they have an impact on decision making. The practice of sharing power is an area of work that is relatively novel in services for young people. While there are lessons to be learnt from the developments of adult service user participation and young people's participation in other aspects of community life, their participation in social services decision making is still being developed.

The factors that have produced young people's participation in the formal processes of social work, namely specific rights to participate and a greater role for service users, imply that their involvement will lead to a transfer of power from those who produce services to those who use them. Government now has an expectation that young people will be involved in policy and

planning, and has expressed a commitment that policies should be socially inclusive. Social justice for young people looked after is a policy aim but what changes their involvement will bring is yet to be tested.

How power works in organisations and society in general has been the site of extensive academic study and the models and theories that have been produced offer the means of gauging whether any transfer has taken place. These are used in the empirical part of this study where the picture of greater participation outlined in the literature is tested. This indicates that power operates at many levels and is not a commodity that can be given away by those who possess it, but must be taken by those who desire it. The literature reviewed in this chapter has not established that young people want to take power in social services but adults who work on their behalf argue that their involvement will produce more effective services that ensure they are not disadvantaged. Greater involvement is propounded as a means of improving young people's social standing and ensuring social justice for the socially excluded.

The present government is driven by ideas of social justice and wants policy to be rooted in the interests of the people. The communitarian strand of political philosophy has been identified with government initiatives on social inclusion, ensuring that people are positioned inside their communities and that the rights that go with membership are balanced against responsibilities to fellow community members. When this commitment is applied to young people looked after by the local state, it comes into conflict with another part of the New Labour approach, the application of strong central control and the use of management techniques of target setting and inspection to deliver change. It is not yet clear whether these competing forces will enhance or reduce the impact young people can make in social services policy making. They are the focus of government policy and spaces are opening up for them to engage with policy makers. What shape their participation takes and what impact it has is tested by the work that follows.

Chapter 3: Review of Recent Research into Young People's Participation in Social Services Decision Making

3.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews research associated with young people's participation in the work of social services. Results of recent research are presented thematically under the following headings: history of child welfare; children's rights, citizenship and the legal responsibilities of the state; service improvement; better decision-making; child protection; enhancing participation skills, empowerment and self-esteem. While there is less empirical data available about participation by young people as a group in social services policy-making, results of research into young people's individual participation in case planning and service monitoring is outlined. Research from the fields of community development and the general empowerment of young people is reviewed to assess the results of general participatory work with young people. The chapter concludes by considering how research informs policy-making at government level.

The research reviewed demonstrates the range of methods used and focuses on different aspects of the wide range of social work activities, which involve children and young people. The results highlight the diversity of young people's experiences and the different aspects of the social work task, but themes about participation arise across the range of findings and are presented below. This review uses participation as a unifying theme and the different aspects of the process are used as a structure to review the research that has been carried out in the field. Few studies relate directly to group participation in policy-making, but themes from the various research projects contribute to an understanding of the process, stakeholders' views of it and guidelines for practice.

3.2   Recent History of Child Welfare Research

Comparatively, "Childcare research in the United Kingdom has established itself more firmly than in most other European countries" (Colton and Hellinckx 1993 p.245). The recent history of childcare in England and Wales demonstrates developments grounded upon inquisitorial and regulatory evidence and the results of academic research. Lessons learned from the findings of inquiries into the abuse of children and young people in substitute family care and residential care have been used to improve the protection offered to young people who live away from home (Levy and Kahan 1991; Utting 1997; Waterhouse 2000). Evidence from regulatory and practice orientated social service inspection reports indicate inconsistency in practice inside and between social service departments. Such evidence has been used subsequently to pursue the provision of consistent levels of care (Hayden *et al*. 1999). Academic studies into the experiences of young people in need and looked after, many of which have been funded by the Department of Health, have been used to develop services that better meet the diverse needs of young people looked after (Ward 1995; Baldry and Kemmis 1998; Laws 1998; Morris 1998, 2000; Thomas and O'Kane 1998, 1999, 2000; Shemmings 2000).

The links between development and implementation of government policy and these different sources of information is well established and research evidence upon which practice is based underpins the government policy on social work provision.

> *… in the United Kingdom, the impact of research on policy and practice is relatively impressive.   The Children Act 1989, which is widely seen as the most far reaching reform of childcare law in England and Wales this century, was informed by [a] series of government commissioned research projects*

(Colton et al. 1995 p.240)

The tradition of research into the care of children separated from their families has tended to focus on service provision rather than outcomes for children (Colton *et al*. 1995). This work has often relied on information

from written case records, social workers or less frequently carers and parents. However, this focus on systems of childcare and the perspectives of adults is changing to an emphasis on individual outcomes for children and young people in need and looked after. Examples of this approach are the work of Barn *et al*. (1997) into race, Morris (1998) into disability and Laws (1998) on users of mental health services. Although it has become more common to include the perspectives of children, the growing number of studies involving them has been uneven and seldom includes those under eight years of age. Teenagers have tended to predominate as respondents (Hill 1997a; Sinclair 1998). Equally, despite notable exceptions, little feedback has been obtained from children from ethnic backgrounds or those affected by disability (Butler and Williamson 1994; Barn *et al.* 1997; Hill 1997a, 1997b; Morris 1998, 2000). There has also been more work with those young people who live away from home than with service users in need who still live in the parental home (Hill 1997a).

While different research projects have covered specific issues or types of service, for instance child protection (Schofield and Thoburn 1996), leaving care services (Broad 1998) or individual case planning (Thomas and O'Kane 1999), in practice these areas may overlap.

3.3 Children's Rights, Citizenship and the Legal Responsibilities of the State

Children are citizens and service users and these roles give them fundamental rights to participate in service-related decisions. The UNCRC, the Children Act 1989, Best Value Framework and Children's Service Plans Guidance legitimise their participation (Sinclair and Franklin 2000). The regulations that guide participation in case planning are based on research commissioned by the Department of Health and Social Security (1985) which established a set of principles for care planning. These principles state that decision-making should be open and shared with clear, specific and written outcomes. Planning meetings should involve children and young people working in partnership with parents where appropriate; other agencies, especially health and education, should also be involved.

Subsequent plans made for a child's care should be designed to meet the full range of that child's needs.

The DHSS research also suggested that such principles were unlikely to be put into practice without a statutory framework; regulation and guidance covering planning in the Children Act 1989 provide this.

Research projects have been used to explore the best ways for children to assert their rights to participate and these have increasingly used participatory strategies (Hill 1997a; Ward 1997; Broad and Saunders 1998; Kirby 1999; France *et al*. 2000). Laws' (1998) overview of five mental health projects concluded that young people want those who make decisions about their lives to listen to their voice in matters of their own care and to influence the general way that services operate. Ruck *et al*. (1998) interviewed 169 young people between the ages of eight and sixteen years, from a range of social class groupings in Canada. They found that what adolescents and children think about their rights is influenced by how rights have operated in their own lives.

Kahan (1994) stresses the value of involving young people in planning the daily life of residential units, which improves behaviour and a sense of belonging and constructive participation is more likely when social services departments promote a culture of participation in all their activities (Hill 1997b). Willow (1996), in her work to prepare a practical guide to help residential staff and managers increase young people's participation, reports that where young people develop experience in decision-making through day to day involvement they are more confident as active participants in difficult decisions about their own future lives. Therefore exercising rights to participate in their own care and to influence the general way that services operate provides an opportunity to practise citizenship. However, there is a cultural predisposition to discount the views of children and young people that is built upon a deficit model of childhood. This is exacerbated when children are looked after. There are differences between the social worlds of adults and children but these differences are rarely adequately reflected (Butler and Williamson 1994; Coles 2000;Morris 2000).

In their investigation of 225 children aged eight to twelve years into their participation in reviews and planning meetings in seven local authority areas in England and Wales, Thomas and O'Kane (1999) highlight young people's lack of information about their rights to participate in formal social services decision-making.   They propose a combination of sensitive casework and the building of relationships of trust allied with children knowing their rights and being encouraged to use them as the best mode for facilitating participation in case planning and reviews.

Sinclair and Grimshaw (1995) researched planning and review under the Children Act 1989; this indicated that a participatory meeting is the best way to promote participation. It should provide children with information, be consultative, with children attending meetings and receiving a record of decisions taken.

Grimshaw and Sinclair (1997) later researched planning meetings and found that in three very different local authorities 55% of children attended their review meetings. The majority of 11-15 year olds and nearly all 16-18 year olds attended review meetings – a substantial change from practice ten years previously. Support for language needs was provided in a third of the cases in which the child's first language was not English. Support for children and parents was rarely observed. Some young people were able to achieve a level of participation in meetings, these tended to be older and better prepared. Only a minority were rated as partners. Those who were less able to participate suffered from disadvantages such as learning difficulties. A free flow of discussion at the review meeting did not assist them to participate.

In general young people had to overcome the emotional strain of being placed in the spotlight, especially at large meetings attended by strangers. If young people disagreed with the local authority plan for their care they experienced the discussion as unproductive rather than helpful. They expressed criticism of mechanical approaches to the review agenda that included issues irrelevant to their circumstances.

Adolescents wanted to raise issues about the growth of their personal responsibilities and were aware of the unspecific formulas used in decisions. They felt such decisions reflected the fact that no one in an organisation could take an important decision alone. Chairs and social workers attending meetings considered that children had negative views about reviews. There were doubts that children were fully informed about their rights following reviews.

Sinclair (1998) reviews seventeen research projects that looked at children and young people's experiences of care planning under the state's legal basis for involvement, the Children Act 1989. She found that only a small minority of local authorities provided children with information about meetings, who attends and what they are for. Poor written records were kept by social services of decisions taken and only a quarter of young people received a copy of their care plan. Children's attendance at care planning meetings varied with age: 9% of under fives, 30% 5-10 year olds, 80% 11-15 year olds and 97% 16-18 year olds attended.

Professionals differed when they presented the views of children to meetings. Social workers placed their own interpretation on what young people had told them while guardians' ad litem allowed the child's voice to come through with the use of 'extensive quotations' and detailed accounts of interviews. When discussing the nature of participation Sinclair (1998) noted that attendance at meetings does not necessarily imply meaningful participation.

Hill (2001) has pursued a particular focus on research involving young people and social services. In a recent discussion in a forum for the regular exchange of experiences, understanding and ideas around listening to children, he discussed listening to young people looked after. He re-emphasises the now well established tradition of listening to what looked after children have to say and links this with the legal duties placed on local authorities to listen to the voice of this particular group of young people. He notes the increasing moral and practical support for children's rights; much

work in this area has focused on enabling young people to get their views across in meetings. Recent research has shown that young people want adults to respect their views in such settings and not nag or talk at them. The building of relationships and ensuring confidentiality are important aspects of successful communication.

Adults, Hill (2001) has found, are often worried that recognising the right of children to participate means losing control but evidence he has reviewed indicates that young people (with exceptions) are quite measured in their aspirations and recognise that their views have to be reconciled with other considerations. Overall, he points out that adults have more power than children and therefore children need supporters to help them increase their confidence to participate in decision making more fully.

Attendance at planning meetings gives young people the opportunity to exercise their rights of participation.   Research evidence shows that their participation is not as effective as it could be because of their lack of preparation for meetings, not being able to talk freely, feeling ignored and experiencing the meeting as being repetitive and boring. Having the opportunity to exercise rights in a meeting does not in itself lead to effective empowerment.

3.4   Service Improvement

Involving service users in the planning and running of services is now well established in the adult sector of social work service provision (Beresford and Croft 1990; Beresford and Harding 1993; Lindow and Morris 1995) and is increasing in social work with young people. Laws (1998) concluded that consultation with young service users must be an essential part of commissioning services but stresses that they should have a basic level of service that addresses their immediate needs, so that they can then focus on involvement in service planning. She also noted that within discrete service areas young people exhibit diverse characteristics and methods of participation should be tailored to meet their different needs and wants. Routine monitoring that includes the collection of service user views is

essential to good practice and managers need to use people who have skills in communicating with young people, especially using informal methods such as the creative arts. Such involvement needs to have measurable outputs so that young people can assess whether they have meaningfully influenced services.

Consumer surveys have been used to assess the quality of current services and identify areas for improvement (Baldry and Kemmis 1998). Local government as a whole has responded to central government pressures and changes in management style that place the voice of the consumer of services into the policy and planning processes of the whole range of services provided by the local state. This shift to a consumer focus has meant that authorities now regularly research the opinions of local citizens in general, and consumers of services in particular, about the way that services are delivered. Young people have been recognised as a specific group within the population who have different needs to adults and may respond to different research approaches (Atkinson and Boyle 1996). The recognition of these differences has led to the collection of information that has been differentiated from that collected from the population as a whole. An example is a consumer survey of 2,000 young people in the general population conducted by MORI on behalf of the London Borough of Wandsworth. This aimed to find out what young people thought about their local authority. Entitled 'Young people and local authorities: What can we do to make them more interested – should we bother?' (1996) the study concluded that many young people see local authorities as remote. Atkinson and Boyle (1996) suggest that policy makers need to seek out the views of young people and not wait for young people to come to them. Policy makers should avoid glossy documents and humorous cartoons. Atkinson and Boyle found that mechanisms to inform the general population are not widely accessed by young people.

The specific focus on young people has been extended to those looked after or who use particular services such as sexual health advice services. Lobby groups, children's charities and local authorities now conduct large survey research projects to collect young people's views on services, three of which

are now described. The information they produce is designed to inform policy-making and raise issues for particular groups of service users.

The Who Cares? Trust, a voluntary organisation that represents the views of young people looked after, commissioned such a survey in collaboration with the National Consumer Council. A questionnaire was developed with the help of young people in care or who had recently left care. In this national survey, conducted in 1992, 600 young people responded to the questionnaire included in the 20,000 copies of 'Who Cares?' magazine distributed to all children and young people looked after. It aimed to find out what they thought about the care system and the services they received. The report of the survey structured its findings in five categories, one of which was decision-making. In respect of participation the research concluded that:

> *Even when young people feel they are listened to, they do not feel involved in the decisions which so crucially effect them .... They feel ignored and patronised and that their opinions are of little value*
>
> (Fletcher 1993 p.109)

In general the report concluded that the provision of the Children Act 1989 on taking account of the wishes of young people was not working. There was wide variation in both policy and practice. There should be an agreed standard for what young people should expect from the care system.

A similar questionnaire was administered by the Norfolk In Care group in 1995. Lynes and Goddard (1995) analysed a sample of 121 questionnaires, a response rate of 39.4%. This research concluded that young people were now more widely consulted about their care than had been reported in Fletcher's study in 1993. Most young people (87%) felt that they were listened to in their case reviews. Lynes and Goddard changed the questionnaire following consultation with Fletcher to focus on issues that were important to young people, but these changes mean it is not possible to make direct comparisons with the earlier study and studying one department

gives an indication of developments but does not offer a comparative view of national trends.

Baldry and Kemmis (1998) used questions based on the Who Cares? Trust study 'Not Just a Name' to investigate what it is like to be looked after by a London borough. They concluded that, as a way to get feedback from users about being parented by a local authority, the survey proved its worth. Enough young people were prepared to provide data from which conclusions could be drawn about service areas that needed improvement. There were high levels of satisfaction amongst respondents about their current care but important reservations were revealed when questions about planning and decision-making were explored in more depth. The study revealed the need for considerable improvements in practice to ensure that young people are given the information they need and have a say in decisions made about their own lives.

The Who Cares? Trust conducted a second national survey in 1998, reported in 'Remember my Messages' (Shaw 1998). This work aimed to build upon available data that provided information on the range of views and experiences described by young people and develop a sense of prevalence of different types of experience and attitude. It aimed to collect high quality, quantitative data. As this and the previous surveys used different approaches, it is not possible to measure specific changes in young people's attitudes as they were not comparing like with like. In this second report there was no specific section on participation in decision-making and it is not therefore possible to assess any changes in the national status of participation.

The examples of consumer surveys demonstrate that they tend to be wide ranging with no in-depth examination of young people's participation in policy and planning. While they are useful in assessing general feelings about young people's experiences of being looked after, they do not provide concrete proposals for the issues addressed by this study.

There have been small-scale studies investigating particular aspects of young people's experiences as social work consumers. Hill (1997a) collated and reviewed 27 research projects and associated literature. In this broad review that covers child protection, home supervision and residential and foster care, Hill includes a section on decision making. He notes that data have mainly been collected from older children living away from home about individual care planning and the increasing prevalence of mechanisms to collect the group views of young people. He draws conclusions about what young people want from participation with social services. Many of the children that social services deal with have suffered because of the abuse of adult power; participation can enable them to have influence and some degree of control over their own lives. This may improve self-esteem and social skills and reduce their sense of alienation. Whilst participation upholds their right under the UNCRC to be consulted and exercise choice, and it has become the norm for children to attend their own case reviews, there needs to be a greater preparedness genuinely to listen to young people, help prepare them for meetings, reduce the size of groups and explain constraints over their level of influence. Hill found that young people appreciate a hard-headed, warm-hearted, responsive approach from social work professionals in order to secure their participatory rights and rights to proper development, protection and access to services as the UNCRC requires.

Whilst the research Hill reviews provides a useful context for young people's experiences in general decision making at individual case level his work, and that of others, does not include evidence of how young people's group participation in policy and planning has been implemented, nor the results of their participation in terms of shifting power from service providers to young service consumers.

3.4.1 To improve decision-making

Thomas and O'Kane (1999) conducted research in decision making in seven local authority areas. They concluded that far more children are now being included in review meetings – between half and two thirds are now invited

to take part, most of whom attend. The percentage for those under ten years is much lower but they found evidence that many of these children were able to deal with the issues involved if they are given information in a way that they can understand. Those who did attend were often bored and sometimes embarrassed with little idea about who other participants were or the subjects discussed. Using a development of Arnstein's 'Ladder of Participation'(Arnstein 1969), few young people achieved partnership and many failed to get much beyond manipulation. They agreed with Grimshaw and Sinclair (1997) that participation should be regarded as a process with moves away from a single meeting constituting a review to incorporating a series of discussions between different people. Communication should be sensitive and enjoyable with a greater emphasis on young people's right to take part, and for them to have support from friends and advocates to challenge decisions with which they do not agree. They felt that it was important to focus on children's competence rather than incompetence to be involved.

This theme is developed by Shemmings (2000) who researched the views of professionals working in family support and child protection. He found that they could be grouped in two categories; those who hold a 'rescue' position which infers that they feel that they know best for children in decision-making, and those who hold a 'rights' position who seek to empower young people to make their own decisions. In practice, professionals may hold either or both of these positions at the same time; this affects the way they view children's participation in decision-making. They tended to believe that younger children were less competent to participate in difficult meetings such as those connected with child protection work.

Research has become a key component of the mechanisms used to develop participation with young people helping to acquire the data necessary for developing child focussed plans, strategies, policies and practice (Freeman *et al*. 1999). Other mechanisms such as youth councils where young people come together to voice their views about their social and physical environments have also been examined. Matthews *et al*. (1997), Fitzpatrick *et al*. (1998), Coles (2000) and Matthews (2001) assessed their different

levels of effectiveness and addressed issues of representativeness and structure. Generally formal, adult dominated, bureaucratic structures were not found to be conducive to effective participation. Work to assess the effectiveness of participation in social services is underdeveloped at this time.

3.4.2   To promote children's protection

Reports into the abuse of young people in residential care (Levy and Kahan 1991; Utting 1997; Waterhouse 2000) have highlighted the need to listen to children and young people when they report things are going wrong in their care. Schofield and Thoburn (1996) review research on the voice of the child in decision-making in child protection and produce six key lessons. Firstly, that children need a dependable relationship with a helper who can be trusted and who also provides a skilled and caring professional service. This may be the social worker or there may be the need for a separate advocate. Other professionals such as the teacher or school nurse may also have a role to play. Secondly, children and young people need comprehensive information at all stages in the process of support and protection if they are to contribute to the process of decision-making. Thirdly, that the early stages of investigation and offering support or moving into the protection arena are critical for establishing a relationship between the child and the agency workers and in determining the child's role as an active participant – and yet it is at this stage that the child may be least consulted. There needs to be a greater effort to develop models of good practice in this area. Fourthly, that guidance for children to be involved in case conferences and for their wishes and feelings to be specifically addressed is still being followed in a minority of cases. Fifthly, where participation is seen as a priority, children can be enabled to participate more fully in the case conference process.   They need preparation before meetings from workers or advocates who are positive about the contribution children can make, support during the meeting, skilful chairing of the meeting and a respectful approach by conference members and an immediate opportunity after the meeting to discuss their feelings about it and the decisions made. The final key lesson is that

participation by children is of benefit not only to the children themselves but also to the whole decision-making process.

Child protection is a particular system directed at harm reduction and avoidance as a welfare intervention but the lessons from research mirror the findings produced by other investigations of young people's participation in welfare and community development processes.

3.4.3   To enhance children's skills

In his report of the Birmingham Young People's Consultation Project, Lewing (1998) notes that participation needs practice; that children and young people need to learn from their experiences but that structures used in formal community participation take little account of young people and do not appeal to them. This indicates that the process of participation should not necessarily be based on adult priorities and changes are needed in the way that resources are allocated which may mean changing organisational cultures. Children need experience to participate effectively and adults need to be personally and organisationally open to changing the way they make decisions. Biehal *et al*. (1995) surveyed 183 care leavers in three diverse local authorities and noted that young people's experiences in care give them an insight that makes them well placed to participate in the development and monitoring of social services policies. They also noted the advantages of participation in helping to prepare young people to assume adult responsibilities when they become independent.   However they described particular forums that had been used to represent the views of young people that had been abandoned when they became dominated by what was viewed as an unrepresentative group of users. This indicates that the opportunity to develop skills associated with participation should be offered to as large a group of young people as possible.

Broad (1998) researched 46 leaving care projects and noted the wide inconsistency of practice between local authority areas and found no evidence to support a shift in organisational thinking from social services dealing with children moving towards participation on a customer basis.

Where this did exist it tended to be on a superficial level. There is therefore clearly more scope for young people to participate in policy development.

3.4.4   To empower and enhance self-esteem

Treseder (1997) reviews the research evidence from eleven participatory projects and concludes that in most organisations responsibility for making decisions, as well as involvement in the process, remains firmly in the hands of adults. There is a lack of clarity about what participation is seeking to achieve. He cites Hodgson (1995) who identifies five conditions that must be met if participation by children is to achieve its goal of empowerment. Young people must have access to those in power and access to relevant information. There must be a genuine choice between distinctive options. Children need a trusted, independent person who will provide support and, where necessary, be a representative and finally, a means of redress for appeal or complaint.

3.5   Conclusions

Social work professional practice has been shaped by research. Government policy has utilised academic research to inform the way social services do their work. Examples include the 'Looking After Children; Good Parenting, Good Outcomes' systems of monitoring children's development whilst they are looked after (Ward, 1995). This has guided the forms of participation involved in case planning and recording interventions and outcomes used with young people in need and looked after. Research material and evidence-based practice are key components of the government's current modernisation programme for social services and are designed to influence both policy and practice. Quality Protects (a government management initiative already described in the Literature Review) has a clear focus on measurable outcomes and increasing participation of children and young people in the way they are looked after and their involvement in monitoring and planning the services they use. This initiative has been based upon the findings of government inspection teams and the work of academic researchers and researchers employed by the voluntary sector and the pattern of research directly informing practice is set to continue.

The key issues arising from the research reviewed are:

Knowledge of rights

To participate effectively young people should be aware of their rights and have experience of turning these abstract concepts into practical exercises of day to day decision-making. Such experiences increase their skills and confidence to participate more effectively and start to empower them at all levels in big and small matters and set the agenda for change.

Information

Young people need information about the processes of participation in which they are involved. They should know what meetings are for, who is involved, who has the power to make decisions and on what basis the decisions are made. Meetings should have clear outcomes that can be measured so that young people can judge the impact their views have made on decisions taken and they should be provided with feedback about how decisions have been implemented.

Support and advocacy

Young people in need and looked after have important issues to address in their daily lives. Their involvement in service planning should be predicated upon effective support to address their needs and help them participate effectively in individual and group decision-making processes. Adults who are involved in advocacy and support need skills in working with young people, and a creative approach that encompasses diverse methods of eliciting and presenting young people's voices. Professionals need to be aware that their own views of children's competence to be involved will affect who they invite to participate and the levels of decision-making they encourage them to be involved in. Research has identified contrasting views such as the 'rescue' versus 'rights' position and it may be that once recognised in practice, a combination of support and empowerment provides the best context for encouraging and developing participation.

Mutual respect and organisational culture

The stakeholders in the process of participation should respect the views held by others involved and be prepared to address the limits of stakeholder influence. Organisations that foster a culture of listening to all stakeholders, whilst acknowledging the different roles and contributions different stakeholders have to make, stand the greatest chance of promoting successful participation.

Lack of national overview

Research projects have tended to be conducted on a small scale; those consumer surveys that have been done nationally rely upon a small number of responses from the total number of young people in need or looked after. When the research instrument has been changed to increase effectiveness this has ruled out direct comparison of results. The government's Quality Protects initiative is stimulating further research in the area of participation and is monitoring the progress of local authorities in their implementation of participatory strategies. However, there is not an independent, national overview of participation in policy making.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the rationale for the methods chosen. The modified participatory approach that was taken is explained, along with the ethical considerations. There are two parts to the empirical study: a survey of social service departments and case study investigations of three particular departments. The research process is described.

The first objective was to undertake a national sample survey of social services departments in England and Wales in order to provide both a benchmark and a snapshot of participation by young people in social services policy and planning. The second objective was to explore the perceptions of each of the stakeholder groups involved in the participatory process. This was achieved through case studies that used semi-structured in-depth interviews with stakeholders in three different social services departments.

The aim to involve stakeholders and for them to express what was important to them in participation was achieved by employing a modified participatory approach. The research elicits the perceptions of four stakeholder groups amongst whom young people are arguably the most important and certainly central to the study. Such an approach attempts to be anti-oppressive and lets the voice of each stakeholder come through.

4.2   Review of Research Methods Used in Other Studies

Researchers have used a range of methods and latterly they have become more creative in the way that they elicit the voice of young people. Methods used have included **observation** in settings such as residential care, foster care, meetings and court appearances; **self-completion** questionnaires such as postal surveys, surveys to follow up those who had previously been interviewed and questionnaires used as part of casework assessments; **individual interviews** - this is the most common mode used, with semi-structured rather than standardised interviews predominating

(some studies have used repeat interviews to assess developments, for example during the course of a placement); **group discussions** – popularised by market research these are now starting to be used with children, mainly for qualitative data gathering and analysis. This mode is usually used for teenagers in a residential care setting but is also utilised in youth work and community development research.

Childcare research is starting to use methods that mirror the new sociological perception of children as autonomous social actors. It is moving towards working with them as active participants in the research process rather than as passive respondents in a process controlled by adults (Hill 1997a, 2001; Ward 1997; Broad and Saunders 1998; Kirby 1999; France *et al*. 2000). Hill (1997a) notes that the presence of peers in group discussion alters the traditional power imbalance of adult/child interaction and can give children increased confidence to communicate their views. These recent methodological developments are giving young people more power in the research process and offer them the chance to begin to define the research agenda and prioritise what aspects of their lives are important to them. Such developments coincide with the shift in research focus from the technical adult-based areas of service delivery to young people's own assessment of the quality of the services they receive and the part they would wish to play in the way these are devised and delivered.

4.3   Participatory Research: ways of engaging with stakeholders

My social work experience led me to favour methods of research that could help to redress the power imbalance between stakeholders. Hill (1997a), in a research review, has noted the changes that have occurred recently in wider academic research about children that have moved towards more participatory methods which have been underpinned by a reconceptualisation of childhood and adult/child relations. The work of Hill (1997a), Ward (1997), Broad and Saunders (1998), Kirby (1999) and France *et al*. (2000) demonstrates that participatory approaches with young people can produce data that are more closely focused on their needs and can help

to empower them. However, other researchers have experienced problems with participatory methods. Whitmore (1994) thought she had developed a rapport with a group of young mothers on a large council estate with whom she had been working for some time as an academic researcher. She felt that they had good relationships and enough of an understanding of each other's position for her to research a particular issue that affected the group. She soon realised, however, that even though she felt they had been able to share feelings and desires they were in fact talking "a different language", and the concerns of the group were very different from hers (Whitmore 1994). Work by Beresford and Croft (1993) and Lindow and Morris (1995) reinforce these lessons. They note that service users' interests tend to be more personal and rooted in their own lives than in the interests of academics or policy-makers. The development of relationships, the sharing of agendas and striving for equality of power are not straightforward processes and need time to negotiate. Honesty about aims and reflexivity from participants is essential so they can be aware of their own motivations and viewpoints in the research process.

In a review of participatory research, Kirby (1999) evaluated seven Save the Children research projects involving young people as researchers and collected the views of workers and young people involved in fifteen more. She concluded that:

> *Generally, this type of participatory research with young people has much to recommend itself. Young researchers have a lot to personally gain from taking part, and their involvement can benefit the research. The young people also have increased access to decision-making processes, which enable them to fulfil their rights as citizens to participate more fully in society*

> (Kirby 1999 p128).

She balances these positive conclusions against the increased time participatory research takes and the need for young people to be trained, supported and financially rewarded for the work they do. Broad and Saunders (1998) reached similar conclusions when they reviewed their experiences of working with young researchers to investigate the health

concerns of young people leaving care. They concluded that although participation in the research process can improve the quality of data and increases the confidence of young people involved, it has potential risks for them if the project is not adequately resourced or supported. They found that revisiting past care experiences could be painful for peer researchers and those they interviewed. Young people in the project felt ill-prepared to help with feelings produced by talking about traumatic events, or to walk away and leave respondents to cope with painful feelings awakened by interviews. Broad and Saunders conclude that high levels of researcher support are needed if these issues are to be dealt with appropriately. If this support is not available, participatory strategies should not be used.

These findings show that good intention is not enough in itself to produce successful participatory research. Evidence from the literature studied dissuaded me from using a participatory strategy in the project design for this study. The advantages of increased data quality and the chance for young people to exercise some of the skills of citizenship were outweighed by the lack of money available to pay for work and time for training and the appropriate support of young researchers. Therefore this research, while participatory because young people participate in it, is not emancipatory because they neither carry out the research nor frame the agenda. In essence, although their voice is given equal status with that of the other stakeholder groups, the researcher retains control of the research process.

My interest in young people's participation in social services policy making developed during my time as a youth justice social worker, where I was surprised and troubled that the experiences of the young people I worked with did not seem to help shape the services that were provided for them. As a practitioner with a focus on young people's rights, there seemed to be no mechanisms which translated their rights to participate in decision making into changes in policy in my department, nor channelled their experiences as service users into better practice. My interest in this research is grounded in my experiences as a social worker where I sought to empower young people who had been excluded from wider society. These experiences led me to favour methods in which theoretical explanations

arise from what people tell me rather than my application of theoretical concepts and frameworks. It encourages people to tell me about the world as they see it, not how I think they should see it. These explain my choice of semi-structured interviews in case studies that ask people to reflect on their experiences and tell me about them in their own terms. I am a white male in his forties with eighteen years of social work experience working with young people in statutory social work settings. My aim in this research is to stand back from the process to let information emerge from respondents on their terms, but a belief in the right of service users to influence the way service providers treat them underpins this study. "Ex-practitioners have their uses. The former nurse or salesman will retain considerable knowledge and experience and should have high credibility" (Robson 1996 p. 448). My knowledge of social work practice and personal values are characteristics I have used to collect and interpret data in this enquiry.

The work of feminist researchers such as Oakley (1981) has shown that the ways in which research and questions used in it are designed can disadvantage the oppressed.

> *The view [of feminist researchers] is that accepted ways of carrying out research (particularly positivistic, quantitative approaches) are dominated by males and may miss issues specific to women. Structured interviews are regarded as a form of exploitation arising from the differential relationships between the researcher and the respondent, particularly when the former is male and the latter female.*
>
> (Robson 1996 p289)

This view also applies to young people who have had less power to define what should be researched or decide on the most appropriate methods to present their view of the world (Alderson 1995). To counter this imbalance of power, methods that do not impose the adult researcher's preconceptions of the issues being investigated are preferred. Although I designed the study to find out about participation and stakeholder perceptions of the process, I wanted the stakeholders to be able to present their view in their own way

and not be constrained by what I considered to be the key features of participation.

4.4 Ethical Considerations when Engaging with Stakeholders

Ethics are critical in a study that engages small numbers in a participatory project, particularly when young people are numbered amongst those involved.   Different ethical considerations applied to each part of the research project. Whilst the survey was designed to ensure that the general principles of informed consent, confidentiality and avoidance of harm were adhered to, it was young people's involvement in the stakeholder interviews that called for the application of stringent ethical safeguards.

As this research is concerned with stakeholders' experiences of participation and includes young people, it is guided by the general ethical principles of social research.   These principles were considered in the design of the enquiry and informed the way that information was gathered and is to be disseminated. Adherence to such principles is important in any research that includes people or which may have an impact on their lives (Sieber 1992; Taylor 1996) but it is especially important when conducting research with young people who are relatively powerless in society (Alderson 1995; France *et al*. 2000).

General ethical principles offer a framework for researchers' enquiries and expect that subjects' identities should be protected so that the information collected does not embarrass or in any way harm them and that they are treated with respect and their co-operation is sought before they are involved in the research. When negotiating permission to do a study, it should be made clear to respondents what the terms of the agreement are. Reports should be truthful (Blaxter et al. 1998).

Professional groups who produce guidance for their members make these guidelines more specific.   For example, The British Sociological Association (Gilbert 1995) produces guidance for sociologists that focuses

on three main areas: professional integrity; relationships with, and responsibility towards, research participants; and relations with and responsibilities to sponsors and/or funders. Sociologists are made aware that they have a responsibility to ensure that participants are not harmed by the research, that they freely consent to participate and have their confidentiality and anonymity respected. These principles form the basis of the relationship between researchers and the people who provide them with information and are the rules of conduct adopted for this enquiry.

4.4.1 Avoiding harm to participants

As well as those directly involved in research projects, Sapsford and Abbott (1996) make the point that 'harm to subjects' should be broadened to include the group those subjects may be taken to represent. In this enquiry this includes young people, front-line workers, managers and elected members. They also highlight the potential for harm that can arise in the process of giving information about sensitive subjects because reliving distressing and painful experiences could cause long-term psychological distress in some informants (Sapsford and Abbott 1996; Broad and Saunders 1998). Young people who have been looked after may have experiences that would be potentially painful to recall. While it is not the aim of this project to explore directly their personal histories of care, discussion of participation in a loosely structured, informal style of interview could raise memories that are painful or that need time to work through. Specific arrangements were made in this research to have a suitably qualified person available to participants should they wish to continue a process of disclosure started by the research interview. This was arranged through each of the departments where access was agreed and was part of the research plan discussed with gatekeepers. Ward (1997) reinforces the notion that researchers have a responsibility to assist participants, where necessary, in receiving appropriate help or counselling where painful experiences have been explored.

4.4.2   Informed consent for participants

Silverman (2000) defines informed consent as giving information about the research, which is relevant to subjects' decisions about whether to participate and that subjects understand that information (e.g. by providing information sheets written in the subjects' language). Researchers should ensure that participation is voluntary, for example by requiring written consent, or obtain consent by proxy (e.g. from their parents) where subjects are not competent to agree (e.g. small children).

Additionally, participants should be given information about how the data may be used and if their words may appear in reports or publications before deciding whether they wish to be involved. In the survey this was achieved by negotiation of access with three groups: the Association of Directors of Social Services Research Committee; Directors of Social Services who were to be part of the sample; and with individual respondents who were to complete the questionnaire.   The gaining of consent of stakeholder interviewees was achieved by writing to each respondent explaining the nature of the research; the topics of interview, proposed dissemination and assured confidentiality (see Appendix 2).   At interview, these were explained verbally.   Subjects signed written consent forms that further explained that consent could be withdrawn during or after the interviews had been conducted, and that all records of the interview would be returned to them (Appendix 3).

While basic ethical guidelines are useful at a general level they do not specifically address the particularities of research that involves children and young people. Alderson (1995) points to their relative powerlessness and the importance of consent as a guiding principle to practice. She aims to redress the power imbalance between adults and children by stressing the need for their consent at all stages of the research process, thereby giving them opportunities to change their minds and refuse further involvement at any time. In order that they can make these decisions they need to be well informed and have the correct information about the proposed research and

its 'costs and benefits' to them. France *et al.* (2000), who have conducted work with young people in secondary schools, support her in this view.

Organisations that work with young people are developing their own ethical guidelines for research undertaken by, for or with them. An example is that produced by The Children's Society who ask researchers to consider the following questions.

(1) Was meaningful consent to participation obtained? (that is, was the purpose of the investigation explained to young people in appropriate language – and at an appropriate level?)

(2) Were specialist resources available to assist in communicating with disabled young people, or young people for who English was not their first language?

(3) Were young people informed that they had the right to withdraw at any time?

(4) Were young people asked if they would like to know the outcome of the investigation and if so, in which form they would prefer to receive their feedback?

(5) Were young people asked for specific permission to disseminate their words?

(6) Were they assured that all tape recordings would be destroyed after this specific dissemination had been achieved?

(The Children's Society 2000)

Although these guidelines were produced after the fieldwork for this project was completed, I was able to comply with their overall aims and only failed to give an undertaking to destroy the recordings of the interviews after dissemination. None of the young people interviewed was disabled and all used English as their first language.

The power imbalance between young people and adults, and service providers and service users means that young people may be unwilling to refuse consent to an adult researcher who they may view as a powerful figure. This could be relevant to this study as I am a white, middle aged male who has been employed as a social worker and who was introduced to

young stakeholders by a senior member of the department being researched. To address this, before asking for the consent of the young stakeholders they were informed that the researcher was independent of the department who looked after them and that there would be no implications for them if they did not want to be involved. Giving such assurances does not mean that young people would accept them, but no one refused to talk to me and I did not detect any feeling that young people felt they would get into trouble if they did not take part in the interviews.

4.4.3   Confidentiality

The assurance of confidentiality and anonymity to research participants is standard research practice to avoid possible harm, but this may be at odds with the young people's right to protection (Alderson 1995). If during the course of an interview they tell the researcher about things that place them in danger, the need to ensure confidentiality may conflict with their right to protection. In these circumstances the researcher should have explained any limits to the confidentiality they are proposing to exercise, and this is part of the information young people use to decide if they want to take part in the research project. This limit to confidentiality was explained to the young stakeholders and linked to the availability of a named social services worker from their department who could follow up any disclosures of abuse or potential danger that arose in any of the interviews.

4.5   The Survey

4.5.1   Introduction

The review of literature identified the lack of a national picture of young people's participation. Information from professional contacts indicated that they were being involved but it was not known how many young people, their ages or the methods being used to involve them. To produce a baseline of current participatory activity a survey was undertaken. This is a method of collecting data using pre-formulated questions in a predetermined sequence. The information is drawn from a sample that is representative of a defined population (Blaxter 1998). The population in this case was the total number of local authority social services departments in England and

Wales - a total of 150 at the time of the survey. Identifying and contacting departments was straightforward because they are listed in a number of annually updated handbooks such as the Municipal Year Book.

The decision to use stakeholder interviews as the means to discover *why* or *how* activities were taking place meant that the survey for this project could concentrate on the descriptive aspects of the processes and leave closer scrutiny to the interviews that would take place later in the study. Bulmer (1984) has shown the value of using a descriptive survey in this way particularly to portray accurately the characteristics of selected individuals, situations or groups.

The survey provides an overview of what was happening in social services departments during December 1998 and January 1999 and contextualises the information from the stakeholder interviews conducted in 1999 and 2000. Knowing that interviews would be used to gain an in-depth knowledge of particular cases, the survey did not attempt to examine each responding department in detail. In essence, the questionnaire needed to be short, simple and easy to administer, thereby increasing the likelihood of completion (Oppenheim 1992). Telephone contact with respondents during the targeting phase and later during the collection of data helped to unravel how terms such as involvement, participation and empowerment may be differentially interpreted.

4.5.2   Objectives of the survey

The survey was designed to produce quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data included information on how many departments were working with young people. The reasons departments gave for not working with young people were quantified to give an insight into departmental thinking about the priorities for including the voice of young people and to see if it had been tried before but failed. To explore the history and changing construction of participation, the length of time that departments had been involved was investigated. This information was linked with the later questions about the forms of participation and provided a commentary

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upon whether approaches had changed as stakeholders became more experienced in what they were doing. Departments were asked how many young people were involved, to enable an evaluation of the extent of participation, along with the ages of young people involved to assess the department's views of young people's competence to participate. Finally, the forms or modes of participation used were explored to find out if common procedures or diverse approaches to bringing young people's voices into policy making were being employed across the survey sample.

Qualitative data included examples and evidence of participation which established its mode and nature. The benefits and difficulties of engaging with participatory practices were investigated to offer a clearer view of the concerns of social services departments and of their perceptions of young people's concerns. Through the examination of solutions to any problems that had arisen in the process of participation, the evolution of the department's approach was delineated. The motives for involving young people were explored by asking departments about what they saw as most important in the process of participation.

This mix of quantitative and qualitative data provides an overall picture of participation and some insight into departmental thinking about its history and development. A copy of the questionnaire is provided in Appendix 1.

4.5.3   Piloting of questionnaire

The questionnaire was piloted to confirm that respondents could understand the questions and produce data that would fulfil the research aims, to check that it was 'user friendly' and that respondents could find their way through the questionnaire. A pilot was also important to ensure that respondents at different positions in the organisation were competent to respond and to ask experienced informants to identify any gaps in the questionnaire and offer suggestions for further questions that could be included.

The questionnaire was piloted by key agents in an attempt to replicate the levels of knowledge and experience of proposed respondents: these included

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a children's rights officer in an authority that had been actively encouraging young people's participation since 1985; a policy officer in a county authority; and the chair of the Children's Rights and Advocates Association. The key agents confirmed the suitability and wording of the questions. All three were able to provide the information requested even though they operated at different levels in the management structures of their organisations. Whilst the majority of questions were appropriate and should produce data that fulfilled the aims of the enquiry, they commented on the age ranges on the questionnaire, that the term 'policy' could be interpreted in different ways by respondents and suggested a range of other questions that could have provided a deeper insight into the workings of each department. However had these questions been included they would have increased the amount of time and commitment required of respondents and it was judged that this would reduce the response rate. These questions were noted as possible prompts or issues for discussion for the semi-structured stakeholder interviews. The questionnaire was changed in the light of this piloting to make the terminology more specific and to redefine the age ranges of young people.

4.5.4 Access to the research sites

Before deciding on the sample of social service departments, approval for the project had to be negotiated through the Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS) Research Committee. It was recognised that social service departments are unlikely to respond to unsolicited questionnaires without ADSS Research Committee approval (Heptinstall 2000). The Committee provides a standard application form and charges a fee for considering the proposal. On the submission of the revised questionnaire they asked for details of the proposed enquiry, what relevance it may have for social services departments and the amount of time it would take staff to complete. There seemed to be a clear emphasis on granting access to research that supports and enhances the work of social services and weeding out projects that do not contribute clear benefits or that take up large amounts of staff time. The application of this research was submitted six months before the proposed distribution of the questionnaire as the time

span between submission of the application and notification of approval is given as between four and six weeks (Heptinstall 2000). This gave sufficient time for further amendments and any unforeseen administrative delays. Permission to proceed was granted within one month of application.

4.5.5 Selection of sample

The survey was intended to provide a snapshot of current practice and give an overview of participation in social service departments in England and Wales. The sample needed to be large enough to be representative, but small enough to be administered by one person, with as many responses as possible gathered over the telephone. This was to clarify terms such as policy, involvement and participation with respondents, maximise the return rate and make personal contacts that would be used in targeting departments for stakeholder interviews.

At the time of the survey the total number of social service departments in England and Wales was 150 (Municipal Yearbook 1998). A 20% sample was decided upon. This enabled the sample frame to be stratified to reflect the five different organisational categories into which social services departments in England and Wales were grouped:

County Council	35 authorities
London borough	32 authorities
Metropolitan	36 authorities
Unitary	25 authorities
Wales unitary	22 authorities

The sample size was determined as follows:

County Council	7	(20%)
London borough	6	(18.75%)
Metropolitan	7	(19.44%)
Unitary	5	(20%)
Wales unitary	4	(18.18%)

The systematic selection of departments was accomplished by using the Municipal Yearbook and selecting every fifth department on its alphabetical list in each category. "…the strategy is to obtain representatives of the various elements of a population, usually in the relative proportions in which they occur in the population" (Robson 1996 p.140). The total number of departments selected was 29, a stratified sample derived from a systematic sampling process (May 1997).

4.5.6   Targeting of respondents

The small size of the sample meant that a high response rate from respondents with a good depth of knowledge of participation in their own departments was needed to produce valid conclusions and be able to generalise from the data. The researcher's previous practice experience had shown that knowledge about participation was unlikely to be widespread in departments and may be limited to those people directly involved. This meant that it was important to target specific respondents who had information about the process and who could offer a departmental view. It would then be possible to produce an accurate picture of participation in departments at the time the survey was administered.

A letter was sent to each director of social services chosen by the sampling process to gain their consent. The letter informed them about the project, that the research was backed by the ADSS Research Committee, and included a copy of the questionnaire (Appendix 1). Notification was also given that the department would be contacted by the researcher to identify the person best qualified to respond. All directors were given the opportunity to refuse consent at this stage. The onus was on the researcher, rather than the director, to target the most suitable respondent.

In order to achieve the highest response rate possible for the study, a strategy of respondent familiarisation and targeting was employed. After the director had been contacted, but before questionnaires and covering letters were sent out, telephone calls were made to each department's headquarters. The research was described and enquiries made as to who in

the department would be the best placed to provide the data needed. The name of the potential respondent along with their professional title, location and telephone and extension number were noted, and a separate log sheet for each department was drawn up. Telephone calls were then made to the individual concerned and a log taken of the attempts to contact them. When contact was made the research was explained and they were asked if they would be willing to be involved. It was explained that the research was sanctioned by the ADSS, and what information was needed. If they gave consent, respondents were told to expect a copy of the questionnaire within the next two weeks. The researcher's name, the name of the home institution and telephone number were made available to each of the respondents. They were encouraged to use these if they had any questions about the research prior to completing the questionnaires. This was a method of personalising consent over and above permission already granted from the ADSS. In this way I hoped to avoid any negative feelings that may have been generated in respondents who may feel that their own consent should not be assumed by the ADSS or their Director on their behalf.

From these initial targeting calls it was possible to pick up the levels of interest in the research topic. In general respondents were positive about the study although some were not sure that their department was doing anything that warranted interest. There were examples of respondents who indicated that they were under pressure from other work commitments and without the ADSS sanction would have been unlikely to respond. Other respondents themselves had research experience and were willing to help a fellow researcher. All respondents were told that they would receive a personal copy of the report from the survey because they had provided data for it. This was an attempt to increase their motivation to complete the form, by providing a tangible result from their involvement.

4.5.7   Delivery of the questionnaire

Once a respondent had made an oral agreement to take part, they were told that a questionnaire (Appendix 1) would be sent directly to them and that they would be contacted by telephone to record their responses. The forms

were sent out in the second week of December 1998 and respondents were contacted a week later. It was hoped to get more detailed data from telephone completion as this offered the chance to clarify the issues of participation and prompt responses that would build on the questions on the form. Also, my recording of the information reduced the effort respondents had to put into the process and would increase the likelihood of completion. Not all respondents wanted to do this, some preferring to complete the questionnaire in their own time and return it either by post, e-mail or fax.

4.5.8 Monitoring data retrieval

To record the progress of data retrieval, two separate log sheets were used; one to record respondents' details and a second daily log sheet. The first sheet contained general information about respondents, for example; periods of holiday, sickness, role change and availability. The second sheet was used to record every telephone call made on each particular a day, who was spoken to and what their responses were. Using these methods it was possible to build up a picture of the respondents and monitor the progress of data retrieval. As the daily list of telephone calls was worked through, completed targets were crossed off to ensure that unnecessary phone calls were not made to respondents who had already supplied data.

The aim of these methods was to produce a high response rate for the survey and make personal contacts that could lead to access to case study sites. A 97% response rate was achieved and data were collected over two working weeks. A bonus of this approach was that it led to contacts with gatekeepers who were able to help to organise access to the three departments later used as case studies.

4.5.9 Completion statistics

The overall completion rate was 97%, with only one department failing to respond after written and telephone contact.

Oral responses	17
Written responses	11

When the written responses were received they were checked; three required follow up telephone calls to clarify some of the answers that they contained. One form in particular stated that a department was not involving young people when I already had information from background interviews that indicated that they were, and had been doing so for some time. These calls gave me the chance to check the validity of the data and thank respondents personally for the time they had put into completing the form. I made particular efforts to talk to departments that said they did not involve young people. This follow up found that even though they were not doing anything at the time of the survey two departments had plans in place to start work in the future and were positive about young people's participation.

4.5.10 Reports to respondents

After the questionnaires were analysed, each respondent, their director and the ADSS were sent a copy of the findings. These were provided in the form of a short briefing paper (Appendix 4). This feedback was intended to provide respondents with a return for the time they had put into completing the questionnaire and a covering letter thanking them for their help was included. Ethical considerations meant that in the survey none of the respondents would be identified in any reports produced and any comments that they made would not be attributable to individuals or departments.

4.6 The Case Studies

4.6.1 Introduction

The survey was used to provide a snapshot of participation and provide the context for in-depth stakeholder interviews. It indicated the levels of participation nationally. The case studies were designed to build on this quantification to explore why and how participation takes place and to provide a more rounded profile of the participation process. A case study is:

> *...a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence*

(Robson 1996 p.146).

Case study is not a method in itself but a choice of object to be studied, a bounded system within which methods of enquiry are used (Yin 1989; Hamel *et al*. 1993; Stake 1998). Case studies can comment upon artefacts such as policy documents, case records and children's service plans. However, the main thrust of this research is the relationship between different groups of people who work together to produce social services policy, what influences them and how much power they have. Stakeholders are likely to have different histories, different roles and different visions of their futures. Their work in policy making is political because it is part of local state activity and professional because it provides the framework for local social work delivery. Stakeholders have their own priorities and expectations and will be driven by different motivations. In consequence, a method was needed to provide a way for them to reflect on their role in forming policy and then articulate their perceptions.

Some researchers who have investigated young people's perceptions (Hill 1997a; Ward 1997; Kirby 1999) have sought to empower them by involving them in all aspects of the research process. Such strategies are designed to reduce the power differential operating between adults and young people and between researchers and those being researched. These methods could have been used in this study. Work by Broad and Saunders (1998) who worked with young people as peer researchers highlight the advantages of such an approach. These include better quality data and an empowering experience for researchers and respondents. However, these benefits are offset by the cost of training, the high levels of support young people needed to produce high-quality data and the emotional costs to researchers who were examining issues with an emotional content (for a full debate see earlier section on participatory research).

To be able to capture the different voices of stakeholders, interviews should encourage them to define their own images of participation and talk about it in ways that are most appropriate for them – that is, to provide a space to elaborate on their own experiences. Formal questionnaires or interviews with closed questions do not facilitate such reflection. My focus of participation sets parameters for the questions but leaves room for interviewees to conceptualise and describe their situation and present it in their own terms.

4.6.2   Objectives of the study

According to Colebatch "policy emerges from an organisationally-complex process" (Colebatch 1998 p.105). Case study methods allow the complexities found inside social services to be examined. Departments have diverse goals and contain diverse sub-groups who may have conflicting concerns and interests (Powell 1997; Mullender and Perrott 1998). Understanding these issues is among the aims of this study – that is, to establish whether there is a common goal and a common vision for participation. The perceptions of each group of stakeholders in the policy process (young people, front-line workers, managers and elected members) are explored and described in relation to the others. It was anticipated that in each department, local policy and its implementation is the product of complex interaction involving these stakeholders and although some groups may have more power to shape outcomes, each has the potential to influence the final policy decisions taken. For example elected members have the final say in the decisions about levels of funding for particular services, but they reach these decisions using information provided by managers who have assessed levels of need and propose service plans to address these. Elected members act through a formal process of recommendations tabled at council committees. However, the extent of influence on recommendations, particularly that of young people, is unknown. Neither do we know what form their involvement takes. Information or influence from more than one stakeholder group may therefore have influenced the final policy product and the stakeholders may also influence each other.

4.6.3 Issues for stakeholder interviews

Willow (1997), Feeney (1998) and Hayden *et al.* (1999) showed that young people are participating in the public sphere in a variety of ways. Their participation is linked to specific rights in a developing paradigm of citizenship and consumer rights, and is often proposed as a way of empowering them. The stakeholder interviews aimed to set the realities of stakeholder participation against the factors described in such literature and to find out if young people's participation was in fact an empowering experience. References to citizenship, consumerism and empowerment were not made by many of the key agents while piloting the questionnaire. Neither the words nor the concepts arose in the majority of interviews with people who were involved in participation. Young people in particular did not describe what they were doing, or the reasons why they were doing them, in such terms. Realising that the concepts from the literature were not used by stakeholders, I did not think that asking direct questions (such as: do you associate your participation with the exercise of children's rights? or, do you think that participation is a suitable way to empower young people?) would help me pursue the aims of this study because not all respondents would either understand or attach the same meanings to these questions. I wanted their experiences and views to be the starting point for a discussion that could then develop to explore issues that were important to them. To achieve this I asked general open questions about stakeholders' experiences of participation using a semi-structured format.

Interviews were divided into three sections (past, present and proposed involvement in policy making) and stakeholders were asked to talk about what they had done, what they were doing now and how they saw their involvement developing. During the course of the interviews I asked supplementary questions about issues stakeholders raised. These accounts were subsequently analysed using the concepts of power, participation, rights and consumerism, to try and identify the factors driving young people's participation in social services policy making.

Although the interviews were recorded and transcribed, and were later used as the main evidence for analysis, the transcripts were not the only basis for my interpretation. The way that information was presented as well as the content contributed to my overall perception of each case study site. The importance of presentation is illustrated in Ludovic Kennedy's account of the trial of Stephen Ward:

> *But this was yet another example of the difference between how things sounded at the time and how they read afterwards. Mr Burge [the defence council] read far more effectively than he sounded: Mr Griffith-Jones [for the prosecution] sounded much more hostile than he read. And now here was the judge who at the time sounded totally unsympathetic to the accused, yet who read so sweetly afterwards. When I first saw the summing up I could hardly believe I had an accurate report of it, so great was the gulf between the words and my memory of them…it was not that the judge had omitted what was favourable to Ward – the record belied that. It was simply a question of emphasis… It was this that made the summing up sound so one-sided.*

(Kennedy 1965 p.209-210)

Using interview transcripts, the ways ideas were delivered and my experience of working in social services departments, I aimed to give depth to the data that I gathered. For this reason my impressions are included in the analysis of the cases. They are used to help paint as full a picture as possible of participation in the cases being studied.

Areas of interest for the research were how each group perceives themselves and the others in the participation process, whether there are shared visions for participation, what drives the process, if there is any evidence of partnership with, or empowerment for young people and how they see the process of participation developing.

4.6.4   Capturing perceptions

Gyford (1991), Hoggett (1996), Cutler and Waine (1994), Kerley (1994), Leach *et al*. (1994), Clarke (1996), Harrison *et al*. (1997), Exworthy and

Halford (1999) and Jones (1999) all indicate that managers are likely to be the most powerful stakeholder group. Also, as elected members exercise political control of departments, they to should be a significant factor in shaping participation. More recently, young people are seen to have rights to participate coming from their developing citizenship and the increasing consumer focus of service delivery. In contrast, front-line workers, although operating within a professional framework and having direct links with service users, have seen the scope of their professional freedom eroded and their role in participation is unclear. By asking stakeholders how they perceive themselves and the other stakeholder groups, it is possible to develop an idea of the power each has to shape participation and how influential they are in the process. Within each case, I assessed whether the stakeholders shared a view of the power structure in their department and noted any discrepancies in their perceptions.

4.6.5 Shared visions for participation

Asking questions about what types or modes of participation were happening, how they had been instigated, and why, produced data that were compared across the groups. I rationalised that even though stakeholders were involved in the same process, their perceptions of the process would differ. An example of lack of a shared vision occurs, for example, when a disjunction of views is expressed. Such discrepancies were interpreted as indications that stakeholder groups did not share a common vision.

4.6.6 What drives the process?

I wanted to find out what stakeholders believe motivates participation. Willow (1997), Sinclair (1998) and Hayden *et al*. (1999) indicated that the development of children's rights as part of their evolving citizenship, and a consumer focus, combined with changes in legislation, would all be significant effects. Stakeholder accounts are descriptions of the practical exercise of citizenship in the policy making process and I compared this practice with the theoretical models available in the literature. Service users are a particular sub-set of citizens, and young people are a sub-set of service users. Sharing power as a right implies an exercise of citizenship. However,

there may be other shifts in power. For example elected members may be empowered by meeting young people and having information that differs from that provided by managers. This may lessen managers' power and enhance the position of young people by the empowerment of elected members.

I wanted to know what stakeholders thought was the basis for their involvement in policy making, especially important was how much young people knew about this: did they think they were involved because powerful people were being altruistic, or did they know they had a right to be involved, and that this could give them power in the process? Also, did the other stakeholder groups perceive the young people as competent to fulfil the role of citizen, and if not, what role did they have?

4.6.7   Evidence of empowerment

Within the interviews, I was looking for examples of change brought about by young people's participation. I also wanted to know if young people felt they had the power to make changes and could this be done if other groups were not already in favour of the things they wanted to do. Would they have the power to change policy even if opposed?

4.6.8   What goals do each stakeholder group have for participation?

Interview questions were designed to establish whether stakeholder groups shared a vision of the future. I wanted to explore whether they shared goals and if they applied the same criteria for the successful attainment of them. Also, how did they judge if the process has worked for them? Such data offers a keen insight into competing or common goals and purposes.

4.6.9   Grounding of the researcher

The type of interviewing proposed needs the ability to draw up a framework which pursues the goals of the research, but has the flexibility to operate creatively within this framework. Semi-structured interviews can develop as they go along and provide the flexibility to follow up interesting ideas

without sacrificing the focus of the project. This approach means that the researcher must be clear about what they bring to each interview. This reflective process "involves becoming aware of your own prejudices and assumptions (both personal and academic), so that data collection becomes a joint exchange between you and your subjects" (Matthews and Tucker 2000 p.309).

I am used to conducting interviews in a social work setting but recognise that these have focussed on collecting information for reports, or inducing reflection in service users with the aim of changing behaviour, rather than encouraging reflection that produces data for research. I also recognise that the stakeholders and I have different characteristics; my age, gender, and race, as well as other factors may not be similar to theirs. While there are arguments for using interviewers who are closely matched to respondents, to increase empathy and understanding of a respondent's view of the world (Hill 1997a), I do not have the resources to recruit, train and support a small team of interviewers that matches the different characteristics of respondents. The use of an open, reflective style of interview and data analysis counterbalances these methodological difficulties.

The employment of this type of 'insider research' (Robson 1996) and a reliance on the personal characteristic of a researcher, militates against replicating the study but case studies do not make claims for generalisation and are limited to exploring particular cases that offer insight to the workings of others. It is not claimed that every authority works in the same way as the ones that are studied in this project, but that there may be lessons to be learnt from them.

4.6.10 Selection of case study sites

In this study three cases were selected to reflect the different organisational structures, sizes and locations of local authorities. Each had been involving young people in their policy making for different lengths of time. Semi-structured interviews were used in each case to explore the different perceptions of stakeholders. More than one department was studied to

ensure diversity of practice and approaches. The number was arrived at from a consideration of the need for depth in the research against the number of sites chosen. The resources available to me meant that two stakeholders from each group could be interviewed in each department, a total of 24 interviews.

To enable an examination of the diverse perceptions of stakeholders in the policy process they were divided into four groups: elected members, who represent political power; managers, who represent managerial power; frontline workers, who represent professional power; and young people who represent consumer or citizen power.

Although these are crude groupings and may not take full account of the subtleties of individual agency or the cross over of professionalism with managerialism, they can help with the identification of particular group's power to shape departmental policy.

These groups are the basis on which respondents in each of the case studies were selected and the study aims to explore the diversity of perceptions inside and between the three cases. Any patterns of perception could not be anticipated with confidence at the start of the enquiry. Theory is developed from the data as they are collected rather than a particular theory being tested by it. I did not want the study to be confined by my framework of values, knowledge or perceptions and wanted the different voices of the stakeholders to tell their own stories in their own way. These were then used to quantify the factors driving participation and decide whether power to shape policy was being shared with young people.

4.6.11 Targeting of respondents

Data from the survey produced information about the modes being used in social services' participation. This was used to select case study sites. Those sites that demonstrated structural and geographical diversity were targeted for further work.

Telephone conversations with respondents during the survey provided this information and the opportunity to canvass permission for further research. Following these conversations, three departments were identified.

Our Borough came into effect in 1965 and is a London borough with a long history of involving young people. At the time of the research political control was shared between Conservative and Liberal Democrats, with a significant minority of Labour party councillors.

Our Town came into effect in 1996 in the Local Government reorganisations that created the new unitary authorities. It is a unitary town and surrounding district that retained the characteristics of a county because of its large rural area and urban centre. At the time of the study it was controlled by Labour with the Conservatives having a small minority of seats.

Our City came into effect in 1997 as a new unitary authority. It is a new city unitary that had come out of a large county. It was controlled by Labour with a significant minority of Liberal Democrats and a small number of Conservative councillors.

Each department was interested in finding out more about its own participatory practices and developing young people's influence in the way they worked. The survey's respondents acted as gatekeepers and, because two were policy officers and one a principal manager, they were in positions senior enough to arrange further access for the study. Their knowledge of local participation also meant that they could suggest suitable stakeholders to interview in their departments. These gatekeepers were involved at policy level in young people's participation in their organisations and wanted to find out how it was working in practice. They saw my study as a means of doing this. They were contacted by telephone shortly after they received their copy of the survey results while the study was still fresh in their minds. This contact was used to build relationships and facilitated access to study sites. Prompt dissemination of the survey results was used to enhance my research credibility; a factor I believe helped me negotiate access.

4.6.12 Negotiation of access

During negotiations the gatekeepers gave specific reasons for their interest in my work. Combined with their professional interest in participation each of their departments was due to be inspected by teams from the Audit Commission and Social Services Inspectorate as part of the joint review process. This inspection includes an examination of service user views and how these are represented in planning and policy making. My study provided each department with an independent view that they could subsequently use to compare with the findings of the review staff and to defend their work.

I travelled to each of the proposed case study sites and had meetings with gatekeepers. In two cases they had already spoken to senior managers to arrange access and in the third, the researcher attended a management team meeting to present the study formally and ask for access. All three departments granted access and provided a list of interviewees from the identified stakeholder groups. One department (Our City) asked that I applied for police clearance before interviewing young people they looked after. All of the management groups wanted to know how participation was working in their departments and wanted me to give them a report they could use in the development of local policy. Although a reasonable request, as insight into the process had the potential to improve participation in their departments, I recognised that local dissemination of stakeholder information could compromise the confidentiality offered to interviewees. This was an important issue as each respondent had been assured of confidentiality and if they believed that their comments would be seen by those who had power or influence over them they may be less likely to say what they thought about their departments and any work that they were involved in. Unconsidered dissemination could potentially lead to harm for participants in that it may affect their relationships with people upon whom they depend either as employees, partners in a policy process or most importantly for young people as service users. To satisfy the request for information and maintain confidentiality I agreed to produce a generalised report for each department, which did not attribute information to

individuals or the groups to which they belonged. The report gave an overview of the views of those involved in participatory work and commented on issues raised by more than one group of stakeholders (Appendices 5, 6 and 7).

Using members of management to identify respondents has drawbacks. For example, people chosen may not be representative of the stakeholder group. While I recognise this as an issue, it was impossible to identify stakeholders without the help of gatekeepers who were at management level. Another drawback is that the research may be associated with management. This may limit any criticisms of practices or policies devised and supported by the management group. Elected members or managers may not feel inhibited by such an association but front line workers and young people could be intimidated and be unwilling to criticise the organisation.

As part of the negotiations each department agreed to provide a worker who could be referred to if any of the young people became distressed by any of the issues raised in the research process or who may say things that indicated they may be in danger. Whilst it was not envisaged that the interviews would be about personal or distressing topics discussion of a young person's experience of the care system may trigger distressing memories or emotions. This arrangement helped to address the ethical requirement that no one should be harmed as a result of his or her participation in the research. In the event this facility was not used by any of the young people I talked to.

When negotiations were concluded I asked each gatekeeper to produce a list of names, addresses and telephone numbers so that I could contact stakeholders and set up interviews. One case produced these quickly, but two others were tardy in their responses and needed several telephone reminders. This delay set the research process back by several months. In contact with gatekeepers it was noted that, although they had other priorities, their interest in the project continued. They were still prepared to put in the not inconsiderable time and effort needed to identify and contact potential interviewees.

Timetable

January 1999	Survey completed. Survey reports sent to respondents.
March 1999	Respondents identified during survey as possible gatekeepers contacted.
April 1999	Meetings with gatekeepers. Access arranged.
May 1999	Stakeholders identified by gatekeepers
July/August 1999	Interviews with stakeholders Our Borough.
September 1999	Reports sent to stakeholders Our Borough
October/ November 1999	Interviews with stakeholders Our Town.
December1999/ January 2000	Interviews with stakeholders Our City
March 2000	Reports sent to stakeholders in Our Town and Our City.

4.6.13 The interviews

I sent stakeholders a standard letter that described the research, its aims and objectives and informed them how the interviews would be conducted and the subject for discussion. Issues of confidentiality and consent were addressed (Appendix 3). The independence of the project was stressed but they were told that the results of the research would be made available to them for use in their own department. They were told to expect telephone contact shortly after receipt of the letter. All stakeholders approached agreed to take part in the research and the practicalities of arranging interview locations and timings presented no particular difficulties. Adult stakeholders were interviewed at their place of work or home and young people were interviewed on social services premises.

Each interview lasted no longer than an hour. Most were one to one, but the young people in Our City were members of a group brought together specifically to discuss policy issues, and they chose to be interviewed as a pair. Two managers in Our Town also chose to be interviewed together.

The same format was used throughout. The nature of the research was outlined. Consent was discussed and participants were asked to sign a standard consent form that gave details of the study, the institution that supervised it and asked for contact details if a copy of reports generated was requested. The researcher retained one copy and the other was left with the interviewee. Stakeholders were asked to describe and reflect upon their past, present and proposed future participation in policy making. The interview was recorded and short notes taken in case the recording equipment failed. At the end of the interview stakeholders were asked again if they consented to the information they had provided being used in the study. They also had an opportunity to raise any issues that had not been covered in the interview.

4.6.14 Analysis of interview data

As each of the interviews was completed, I recorded my perceptions of each encounter. Whilst not a primary tool of analysis, recognising my own feelings about each interview contributed to my record of the investigation and acknowledged the reflective approach I was taking in the study. Recordings of interviews were listened to and the transcripts examined. Documentary data collected from each department were examined for information about each department's policy process and the role of stakeholders within it. Subsequently the reports produced by inspectors who conducted the Joint Reviews in each case study site were scrutinised, especially where they referred to the organisation's ability to listen to stakeholders and direct participatory experiences. The data I collected were examined with various themes in mind and for evidence of homogeneity or diversity of stakeholder experiences. An analysis sheet for each transcript containing a list of themes was produced. These lists were compared between groups and within groups. Areas of dissonance or congruence were highlighted. If there were points of congruence within the groups these

were identified, as were points of congruence or dissonance across groups. It was therefore possible to produce a list of issues that were significant for the different groups in the process and how these either coincided with or varied from points from the other groups.

As the analysis of each set of transcripts was completed, I wrote a short report and sent it to each of the respondents in the case study site (Appendices 5, 6, 7). No individuals or groups were identified as raising particular issues, and themes were presented without any ranking order. The decision to use this format flowed from the assurance of confidentiality given to each participant. While this was designed to protect respondents from possible harm, it was left with the proviso that it did not cover disclosures of abuse or situations of possible harm to young people that would have been resolved with previously identified staff members from each department. Stakeholders were invited to comment on these reports; two did so.

4.7   Conclusions

This study aimed to mix quantitative and qualitative approaches to produce results that describe and attempt to explain what is happening when young people are involved in social services policy making. The review of literature indicated that there are power differentials operating between those being researched and the researcher. Recent developments in the sociology of youth and feminist research suggest using participatory methods to overcome these differences, but those who have practised these report difficulties that can arise. The most serious difficulties of which are the cost implications in time and money and the loss of control over the process from the researcher's point of view. These can be overcome, but often place excessive burdens on a small-scale project like this.

This study attempts to maximise the voice of the least powerful, while providing data that can show what factors are working in relationships. On a practice level it was envisaged that the methods chosen provided the optimum conditions for successful data gathering within the resources

available. There is a trade-off between ideals in methods used and resources, but in this respect this project is no different to any other. Lessons learnt can be built into future studies and the research process refined for more effective and insightful work.

The survey was designed to provide an overview of young people's participation. A small sample, effectively targeted through telephone contact, proved successful. It produced a high return rate and direct contact with respondents gave me a feel for the issues that were important to social services personnel. These informal data were used develop the probes and prompts for the semi-structured interviews used in the second stage of the enquiry. Respondents' concerns about tokenism, lack of clarity in the process and lack of partnership with young people, were all issues that were later raised as issues in stakeholder interviews and combining the data produces a measure of triangulation. Whilst the survey provided an overview, in retrospect contact with respondents could have produced more information about the process in a wider range of departments. None the less, the adopted strategy produced high quality data from both departments and from respondents drawn from a range of 'powerful' backgrounds.

Although using respondents from the survey as gatekeepers for the stakeholder interviews was an effective method of gaining access, it also was problematic, largely because it may have introduced bias into the selection of which stakeholders were interviewed. Also, because I was introduced to stakeholders by members of departmental management teams, I was aware that I could be associated with that management group. While bias in selection was a concern, as was the link with members of management, interviews did produce diverse responses and stakeholders were not afraid to criticise their own departments.

The use of an open interview structure enabled the different stakeholder voices to be heard. Such a method provided ample opportunity to compare the differences and similarities in perception across stakeholder groups and across departments. Whilst the terminology used by stakeholders differed, as did their knowledge of the processes they were involved in, they all

provided data that brought the realities of participation to life. My social work experience allowed me to interpret how information was presented as well as what had been said. I have used this 'feel' for what is going on as an element in my analysis of the different ways participation is pursued. Each department felt different to be in; these differences were reflected in what stakeholders had to say.

Chapter 5: The Survey: A National Context

This chapter focuses upon the results of the main survey. It provides an insight into the nature, form and extent of young people's participation in social services departments within England and Wales. This is the first time that such a national picture has been provided.

5.1   Who is Involved?

Most social services departments were at least making some attempt to involve young people in their policy making. Those who had tried and failed were keen to try again. All departments felt that this was an activity that they wanted to do, and were being expected to do, and there was an overwhelmingly positive response to the idea of involving young people in policy making. The trend towards involving young people in the improvement of services in England and Wales is well known (Croft and Beresford 1992; Lindow and Morris 1995; Barnes 1997; Hallett 1998). Equally, there is a growing literature describing young people's involvement in decision making outside the care system (Lansdown 1995; Tearse and West 1997; Freeman *et al*. 1999; Matthews *et al*. 1999). It is understandable, therefore, rather than surprising, that almost all departments had made some positive attempt to include young people by the end of 1998.

There was consistency in the ways in which young people were taking part. The vast majority of departments (89%) said that young people were involved in either one or all of these areas: policy, strategy and planning. Two departments reported that they did not involve young people. However, they were both reviewing their practices and were generally positive about future initiatives. One had previously tried to involve young people but there had been resistance from residential staff to an 'in care group'. The other described how they had begun to work with young people to redesign review forms and plans and to include care leavers in the formulation of a leaving care strategy. These responses are encouraging. They indicate that even those social services departments that do not believe

that they are involving young people in policy making are taking some steps in that direction even in the absence of an overall strategy. Quality Protects legislation now requires all departments to show that they have mechanisms to listen to young people and it can be reasonably assumed that these departments will now move swiftly towards formulating a participatory strategy.

Generally young people's participation is a recent phenomenon. Although about one in ten departments claimed to have been involving young people for a decade or more, more had done so only in the last four years. Thus while some departments had the chance to develop expertise in modes of participation, the majority had relatively little experience to draw upon. See Figure 5.1.
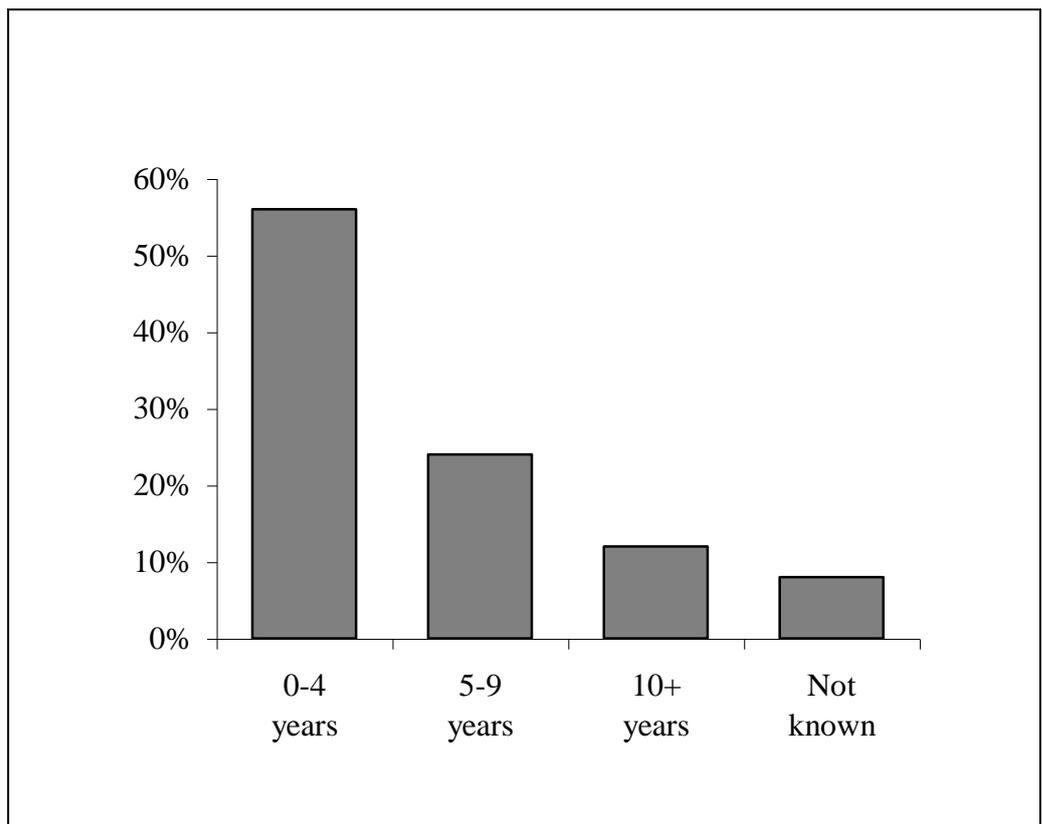
Figure 5.1 Length of time departments had involved young people in their policy making.

Of those departments who had recently involved young people, nearly half (46%) were unitary authorities who had been in existence for less than four

years. It was not clear if the departments were reporting experiences only as new departments, or if they included work that may have gone on prior to changes in status.   In subsequent stakeholder interviews, the two new unitary authorities both said that participation or the desire to include young people in policy making was present in their previous authorities. Unitary status may have given stakeholders the chance to refocus their approach to participation, but continuity may also have been important.   The two stakeholders that were new unitary authorities, Our Town and Our City, both answered the question literally (working for 0-4 years) despite activity in predecessor authorities. Young people's participation is a fairly recent phenomenon and where it has a longer history than the life of new unitaries, previous experience may have been lost with reorganisation.
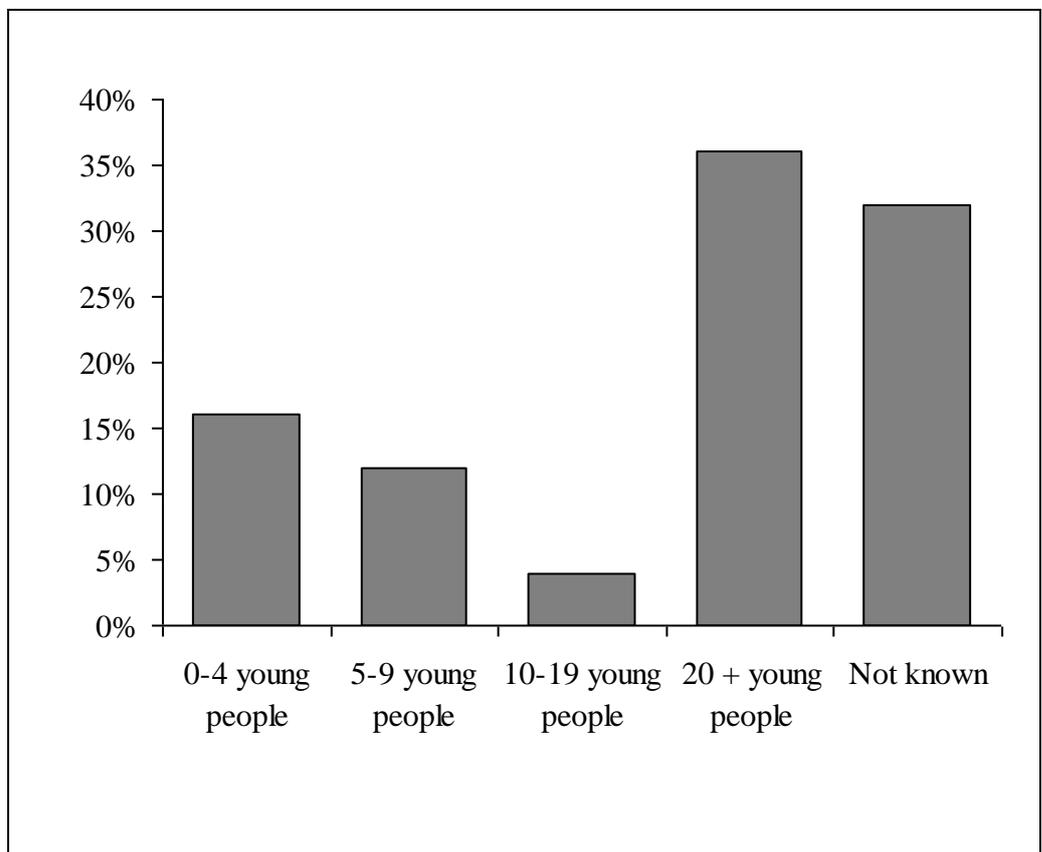
Figure 5.2 Numbers of young people involved by departments at any one time.

The number of young people involved varied enormously. Some authorities worked with over twenty at a time (36%) whilst others with four or fewer (16%). Some authorities did not have a clear idea how many young people they involved. Almost a third (32%) claimed not to know how many young

people were involved. Poor awareness may indicate a disparate process. This possibility is reinforced in stakeholder interviews. Stakeholders who were not directly involved with young people in policy making did not have detailed knowledge of the work going on in their departments, sometimes even in the office where they worked. Often they were isolated by functional rather than physical divides. For example, reviewing officers based in the same office as leaving care workers or youth support workers were sometimes unaware of the participatory work their colleagues were engaged in. Participation did not arise as a topic in reviews even where the young people being reviewed had been involved in designing the process. This narrow focus is within the researcher's own experience.   When employed in a local authority social services department he was unaware of the participatory strategies being used in the rest of the department. Knowledge was confined to those workers directly involved and to the young people, and was not disseminated widely in the department.
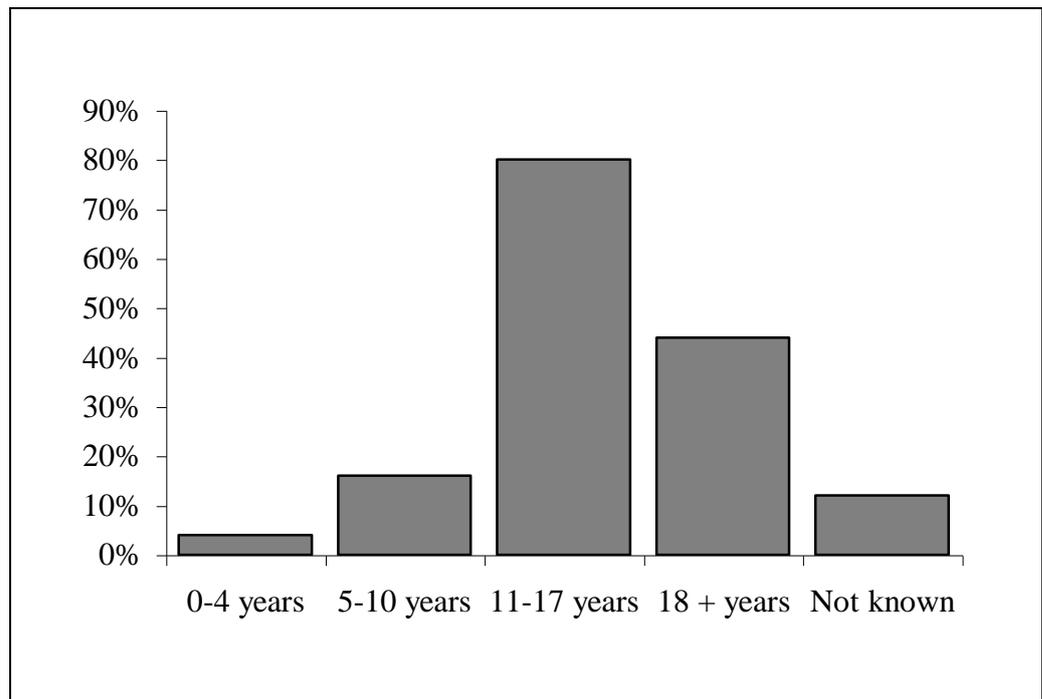
Figure 5.3 Ages of young people engaged in participation

Most authorities (80%) work with older young people (11 to 18+ years) in their participatory strategies, but only one authority was working with pre-school age young people. This pre-school engagement was in the context of

the re-modelling of a housing estate and young people had made a presentation to senior managers about the lack of play equipment.

Four authorities (16%), one metropolitan and three unitaries, reported work with 5-9 year olds. There was no particular mode of participation used with this age group, but the departments wanted to gather information about user perceptions of service quality for use in planning. Indeed, this lack of consistency of approach is a common feature of participatory processes to date. There was little evidence of sharing of ideas or of pooling of good practice, two issues which departments may wish to consider in the future.

When asked to give examples that demonstrated young people's participation in formal policy making, thirteen different types of written policy were reported, but in all but two examples, only by one or two respondents. Individual review arrangements were cited in three responses (12%). Leaving care arrangements predominated (32%). These involved older groups of young people. Two main factors seem important. The first is a desire by departments to generate a greater sense of ownership by increasing young people's motivation to engage and comply with policy on the basis that they helped develop it. This should provide more suitable services with effectively targeted resources (Atkinson and Boyle 1996). Stakeholder interviews with Our Town managers support this view (see Our Town: Managers' Perspective 6.3.1). Second, the older age ranges are considered to be more independent and competent to 'be involved' – indeed their participation may be used as training for independence by increasing self- esteem and familiarising them with adult ways of working. This finding may be linked to adults' perceptions of young people's competence increasing with age (Wyness 2000). Competence is judged as a skill that emerges with maturity and constitutes an aspect of apprenticeship for adult life. Participation strategies described by Hart (1997), Willow (1997), Laws (1998) and Lewing (1998) and show how this negative view of childhood can be transcended. Creative strategies such as role-play, group work, write and draw techniques, all can be used to help young people who are not yet fully literate or who lack confidence in adult forums to contribute to shaping their own environment and service provision. Matthews (2001) has shown

that through a variety of methods and techniques very young people can be engaged in practices and processes to do with community regeneration. In many social services departments views prevail that underestimate young people's abilities and which contribute to their on-going exclusion. Comments made during stakeholder interviews by elected members in Our Borough and Our Town about not burdening the youngest people with the responsibilities of decision making conform to the stereotyping that excludes under-tens. Other contributing factors are their placements in substitute family care, which isolates them from other young people looked after and their status as 'in care'.

5.2   Forms and Evidence of Participation

The most popular modes of participation were through research strategies (Figure 5.4). Surveys (60%) and qualitative research (68%) were the most widely used forms of participation. Youth forums (52%) and other activities (Figure 5.5) too provided 'quick fixes' for getting young people involved. However, as Fitzpatrick *et al*. (1998) have shown, often these are little more than performance indicators on adult agendas. Whether they really get young people involved is often more illusory than real. Direct involvements in council and management meetings were much less common (8%).
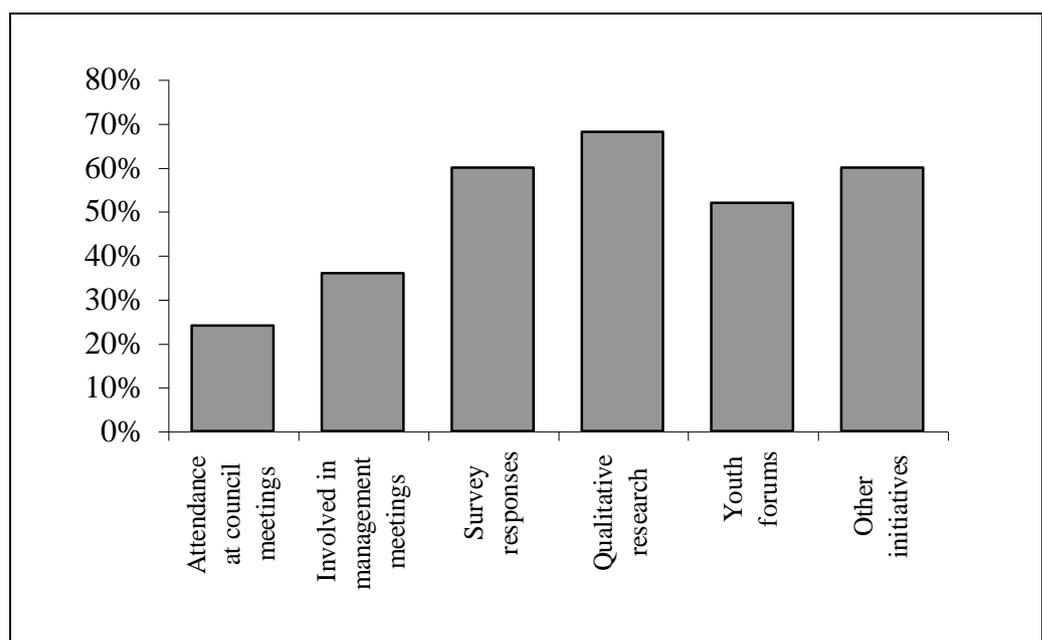
Figure 5.4 Modes of participation

Details of 'other initiatives' (final column Figure 5.4) are broken down and presented as percentages in Figure 5.5.
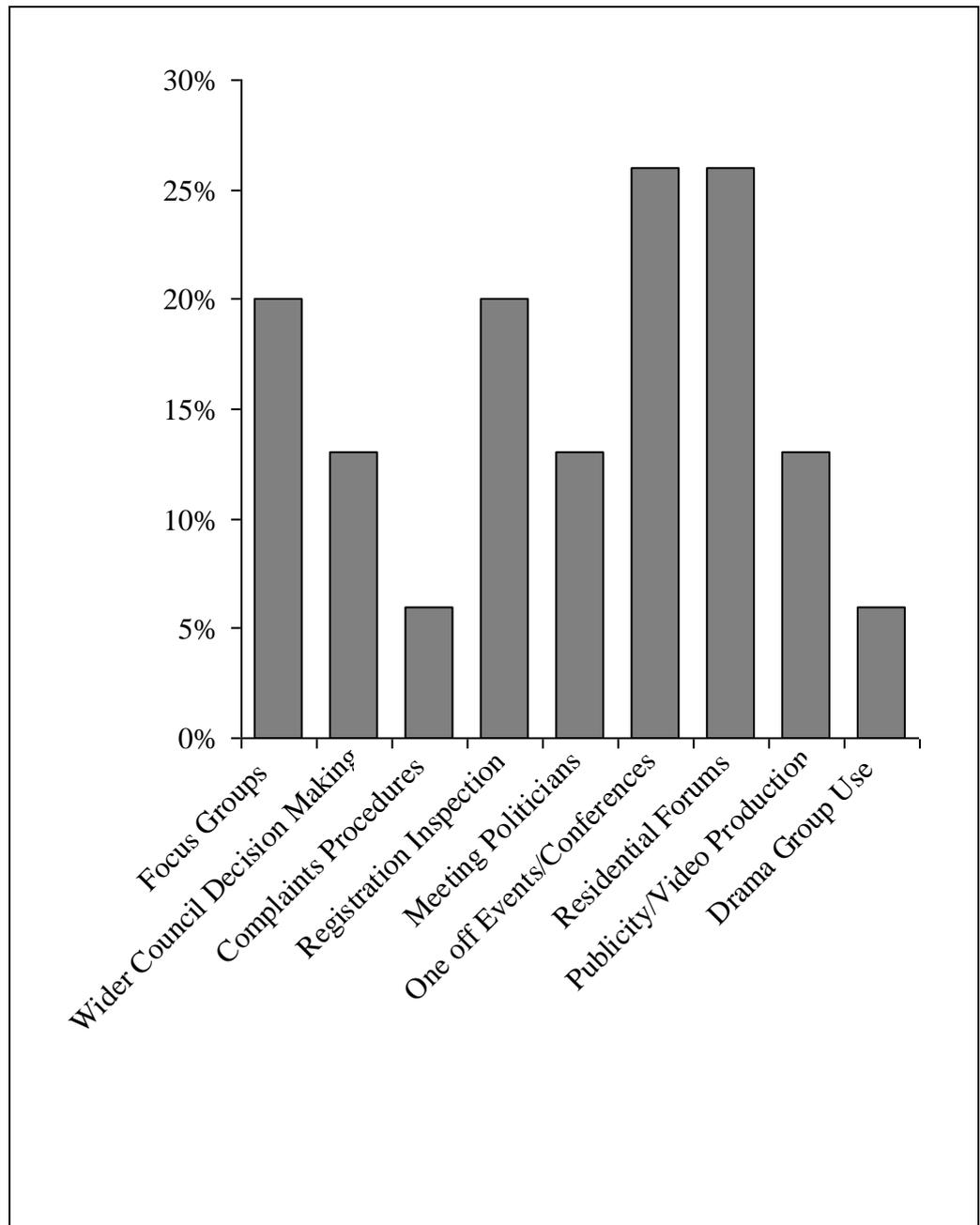
Figure 5.5 A Breakdown of other initiatives.

The modes of participation were not mutually exclusive. Many authorities (76%) reported multiple ways of engaging with young people. This pattern of work was found in each of the cases investigated in depth for this study. All three (12% of the sample) used a variety of modes that could elicit the views of young people. One authority that was investigated, but not included as a case study, had a long history of participation and changed its

strategy over time from choosing particular young people to attend adult forums, such as council sub-committees, to activities that involved larger numbers of young people such as a survey conducted by young people's representatives. This survey does not reveal whether this approach was evident elsewhere, but data from the Our Borough case study are consistent with stakeholders developing different approaches over time.

Although many authorities were able to provide written evidence of young people's role in policy making, notably in leaving care, few were able to show their participation underwritten in all aspects of policy making. An exception was Our City, where there was a commitment that young people's voice should be present in the formulation of its child care policies. This was part of its wider commitment to include their voice in all aspects of the city's services. At the time of the survey departments were not being given clear guidance from the Department of Health about how and when to involve young people in this aspect of service provision, but this changed when Quality Protects came into force shortly after the survey was completed. The ad hoc series of policies addressed through participation in most authorities reinforces the impression that few departments had a clear vision for young people's participation prior to Quality Protects.

Other initiatives that were noted by authorities included one-off events and conferences, residential care forums, focus groups and using the registration/inspection processes (used in around 20-25% of authorities). Where regular residential meetings were held they were often preoccupied with day to day issues. Most discussion was on the domestic side of young people's lives, such as planning menus or arranging excursions, but there was one example provided of development work on anti-bullying strategy. Seventeen of the 25 respondents cited residential meetings as young people's regular participation in policy although policy in this context was the local policy of the units themselves rather than wider 'looked after' issues. Whilst these meetings could impact on local policy within the units and influence wider strategies such as the anti-bullying strategy, there was no evidence that generally young people's participation in this setting was fed into the formulation of departmental policy making as a whole. Prior to

the implementation of Quality Protects local authorities were encouraged by central government to consult young people about the leaving care arrangements drawn up in Children's Services Plans. Survey results indicate that departments had responded to these expectations.

In relation to departmental policy, 9 out of the 25 respondents (36%) stated that young people participated in drawing up leaving care policy and 2 (8%) reported participation in developing children's service plans. In canvassing young people's opinion about leaving care, 32% respondents said that their objective was to learn from young people as customers or users of these services so that what they provided better met the needs of young people who were making the transition to independent living.

Despite the limitations in the amount and extent of involvement, the majority of departments (64%) had participation with young people written into their formal policy, strategy or planning documents. Popular examples were: as part of wider commitments to include all users of services; children's service plans; statement of children's rights or charters; and review strategy documents. Over a quarter of departments (28%) did not have participation written into formal documents and 8% of respondents did not know. In all, fifteen different types of policy documents were evidenced as indicating young people's participation. An example of the range of policies that included participation in one particular department was: quality assurance policy; statements of purpose - children's homes; statements of purpose - children's services; and the complaints process - young people to be treated the same as adults (Later Case Study Our Town).

There was no consistency in documents that incorporated participative policies across departments. Participation was not concerted and ad hoc approaches suggest that participation is not a central aspect of the work of departments. Instead, participation appears under many guises, such as rights or user involvement, but does not permeate policy. Authorities had no common framework for participation neither did they have common strategies nor monitoring procedures to ensure that participation took place and was effective.

5.3   Benefits and Difficulties

There are two main motives for promoting young people's participation, namely adherence to specific rights to participate and an increased role for consumers of service (Lansdown 1995; Pithouse and Williamson 1997). Typically, in social services departments, it was quality of service and consumer issues that drive departments' involvement of young people. Respondents did not talk of fulfilling young people's rights or empowerment, but concentrated on the management issues of effective service delivery and customer satisfaction (Table 5.1). This does not mean that rights had not played a part in defining young people as customers with views that should be respected, but that responses from service providers were given in service terms. These findings are elaborated in stakeholder interviews with managers in Our Borough and Our Town who talked about developments in adult service user participation with its social focus as the strongest influence in their decision to involve young people. Although the survey response from Our City did not discuss rights, subsequent stakeholder interviews with politicians highlighted them as a core factor in young people's participation.

Table 5.1 Benefits of young people's participation

improved quality of service	36%
to include service user view	32%
ownership of policy	20%
empowerment of young people	16%

There was more than one response per authority.

The factors that have led to an increased role for consumers in the adult sector were the political changes brought in by the Thatcher governments after 1979. These emphasised the rights of consumers to have a place in defining service expectations and the parallel rejection of paternalistic service provision by particular groups of users organised around a shared

cultural identity, for example disabled people, older people and mental health service users. Oliver (1990) and Barnes (1997) describe how these movements based their approach on the work of feminists and civil rights campaigners who utilised body politics, the politics of identity, to focus interest on injustice and discrimination on the basis of identity. Such groups began to articulate their own theories of their place in society rather than accepting the categories imposed upon them by the predominantly white, middle class, middle aged, male managed, able bodied professionals. This redefining of their position led to social action to redress the discrimination they suffered. A focus on civil and human rights used lobbying and sometimes direct action to effect change in the law leading to anti-discriminatory legislation (Barnes 1997). These changes have been instituted in practice by the development of direct payments under the Community Care (Direct Payments) Act 1996, initially targeted at disabled people, and subsequently to older people. This system of providing money to service users to purchase their own care has been a successful, empowering strategy that leads to greater control and enhanced quality of life for service users. In 2000, such payments were extended by the Carers and Disabled Children Act which grants entitlement to parents and guardians of disabled children, informal carers and 16 and 17 year olds (Oliver and Barnes 1998; Petch 2002). Against this background, it might be expected that young people would come together to share experiences, define their position and challenge the structures that discriminate against them. No evidence for such a movement was evident in this survey. Although the work of NAYPIC (National Association of Young People in Care) is sometimes cited as a catalyst for participation (Stein and Frost 1992), it ceased to operate before the study took place.

The transient and dispossessed experience of childhood in care is not conducive to organisation. On balance, participation is organised on the basis that adults are trying to improve services for young people rather than young people taking the initiative and exercising a form of political power. It is surmised therefore that social services departments are service led rather than empowering organisations. This point is apparent in Table 5.1

and in the benefits sought from, or attributed to, participatory strategies by social services departments.

Examples of the diverse benefits given by respondents include:

> *Young people's participation should help direct service development according to their needs and not those solely of agencies/carers etc. Their involvement directly in Statutory Plans of Children's Services may help create a greater ownership of service development. (Respondent 6)*
>
> *Young people have a different perspective to social workers and managers. They raise issues that social workers wouldn't. It is more about experiences – gives a sense of young people as personalities and gives a sense of what the peer group is thinking. (Respondent 8)*
>
> *Young people's views different from adults' perceptions of what young people think. (Respondent 13)*
>
> *Young people are users whose views should be heard. Consumer views are more powerful for change than statistics. (Respondent 21)*
>
> *Improving planning of services that are more responsive to the needs of young people and clearer expectations and outcomes improving quality systems. (Respondent 26)*

There are many factors in play justifying a focus on service delivery and successful implementation of policy. It would be a crude analysis that did not recognise concern about young people and with the value of their voices. Nevertheless, the focus is clearly defined in adult terms, that is on young people as consumers and potential contributors to planning.

The majority of departments that involved young people (84%) reported difficulties with their participation. Particular issues included the inadequacy of processes, tokenism, and making participation meaningful. In telephone interviews a common anxiety was that the desire to work with young people was not matched with strategies or expertise that would ensure the process would be successful (Table 5.2).

Table 5.2 Difficulties encountered in pursuing participation

avoiding tokenism/ making participation meaningful	32%
maintaining groups of young people to work on policy making	20%
lack of interest	16%
the culture of the organisation	12%
isolation of young people	4%

Common concerns included:

> *Previous young people's advocacy service considered overly adversarial in the department. Perhaps cultural change needed to embed participation and consultation into the mainstream of service planning and delivery, especially for the most vulnerable groups. (Respondent 2)*

> *Young people who opt out – who don't want to give their views – see it as tokenism. Cultural change is needed. (Respondent 3)*

> *Breaking into it [participation] in the first instance. Policy makers – cultural changes needed – officers know best. Challenges democracy – representatives of the community – where do young people fit in with this? Does participation undermine politicians? (Respondent 17)*

> *Middle managers ambivalent about young people's involvement – lots of work is seen as tokenistic. (Respondent 24 – Our City)*

> *Engaging young people has been problematic. A youth forum was established but has foundered. (Respondent 28)*

Again these responses reflect the diversity of factors discussed by those involved in social services policy making. Sources of problems are not clear but one respondent (Respondent 2) feared challenges and others identified different sources of ambivalence. The range of responses suggests that many social services departments are not culturally disposed to embrace participation. It is not an agency expectation that has been agreed, acted upon and developed over time. Participation is seen as problematic not

because it was not regarded as beneficial but because the environment of the organisation was not conducive to its flourishing.

While there were many responses that outlined the difficulties of participation, few solutions were put forward to address them (Table 5.3). One respondent (Respondent 11), however, (subsequently the case study Our Borough) stood out. Here a range of modes had been employed in an attempt to solve intrinsic difficulties.

Table 5.3 Strategies that authorities had developed to deal with the problems of participation

Setting up specific groups or youth councils	24%
Setting up a children's rights or advocacy service	20%
Conducting care exit interviews with young people	8%

Examples of responses included:

> *Constant dialogue needed … no mechanism as yet – still learning. Members do not really have an idea of issues for young people. (Respondent 3)*
>
> *Be creative in participation, that is to use a fire-eater in the Council Chamber*
> *Shift balance to events young people promote with adults in support.*
> *Use group of young people already involved in participation to support other young people.*
>
> *(Respondent 11 - Our Borough)*
>
> *User focussed approach on particular issues – short term involvement and group focus on specific topic. Recognise issues and work around them. Ensure clarity and boundaries. (Respondent 19)*

These findings are consistent with a lack of a clear definition or agreement on participatory problems. Without a clear understanding of a problem, it is difficult to produce workable solutions. (Table 5.4).

Table 5.4 Perceptions of the most important aspects of working with young people

avoiding tokenism	32%
targeting policy on need and making it effective	32%
keeping involvement on-going	12%
empowering young people	8%

Examples of responses included:

> *Challenges it [participation] poses to professional thinking.*
> *Be clear about the scope for participation, clear boundaries about what is possible in the process – honesty.*
> *Open access to the Director [social services]*
> *Open access to the Council Chamber*
> *Grown ups have a practical responsibility to avoid [young people's] disappointment.*
> *Use collective experiences, skills from group work, experience from elsewhere.*
> *Be pragmatic.*
> *Lots of pizza – tangible benefits for young people.*
>
> *(Respondent 11 – Our Borough)*
>
> *Policy makers can become very mechanical and become alienated from the people they aim to serve. Consultation provides alternative perspectives, options and means of evaluating the effectiveness of different courses of action. Decisions made by professionals and relatives can have dramatic and long-lasting effects on a child/young person's life. Young people should be the focal point - part of the process - not just an outcome. (Respondent 12)*
>
> *It's important to know young people's views about what they consider works for them. (Respondent 13)*
>
> *Tokenism – involvement needs to be real – you have to mean it or young people will suss you out. (Respondent 19)*
>
> *Ideological – services are for users and young people are service users. Ideology now being reinforced by legislation (Best Value and Quality Protects). (Respondent 21)*

Start from where they are not where Social Service Departments are. They [young people] are interested in day to day matters. (Respondent 24 - Our City)

5.4 Conclusions

The survey demonstrates that all the departments contacted were working with, or wanted to work with, young people in their policy making. However, there was no consistency with respect of the ages of those involved, modes used, or the policies which are being addressed. This lack of consistency is potentially harmful, obfuscating 'good practice' and leading to a rather ad hoc stance.

At the time the survey was completed in 1998/1999 there was no single driving force that motivated departments to work with young people. Reasons for participation were diverse and although children's rights were mentioned, service provision and quality issues were given more emphasis than empowerment of young people. In this study, practitioners rarely ascribed participation to the rights of young people to be involved in decision making, but located participation in the framework of service user involvement in improving the quality of welfare services. This does not imply any general desire to empower young people nor to involve them as of right in decision making. The prevalence of research strategies over direct involvement in management or political processes confirms the focus of participation as an adjunct to the management task of ensuring efficient and effective service delivery.

No respondents talked of young people initiating participation or lobbying for a place in the policy making process. All of the initiatives described were started by social service departments or the voluntary agencies they worked in partnership with, and while a rights focus may have informed the desire to give a voice to young people, this voice was not central in defining how the organisation approached its work. Service providers were shaping the debate and including young people in aspects of quality control. From the stakeholder interviews there was little sense or consistent reference to rights to participate and the influences driving young people's participation,

although located in diverse policy initiatives, seemed to focus on them as consumers of service rather than active citizens shaping services from their inception.

Given these findings, it is perhaps not surprising that respondents were concerned about the dangers of tokenism in young people's participation and ensuring that their involvement was meaningful. If departments control the overall process and are unclear themselves about the basis, modes and goals of participation, this does not seem to offer a stable foundation on which to build a dialogue with young people. This particular feature was closely related to the findings in the stakeholder interviews of Our City who had strategic goals to include young people in all aspects of their work yet some stakeholders viewed participation as tokenistic. The good will expressed by participants at the start of participatory processes needs positive experiences of participation and concrete achievement to produce sustainability.

This part of the thesis was designed solely to set the empirical context for the stakeholder interviews. To this effect it has been successful and many of the issues raised will be described in more detail in the next chapter. The considerable effort that went into targeting appropriate respondents inside social services departments was justified by the high response rate (97%). From this it can be inferred that a genuine reflection of the levels of involvement and the characteristic diversity of aims, modes and outcomes of participation in social work departments has been revealed. The lack of a clear rights focus or consistency in participatory elements of particular policy initiatives indicates that social services departments in general are not clear about what they are trying to achieve, nor do they have quantifiable goals to work against. General aims for improved service delivery, empowerment and effectiveness have led to a non-specific focus for participation and confusion about why departments involve young people and what they hope to get by involving them. The subsequent implementation of Quality Protects and related guidance published to assist departments with participation (Sinclair and Franklin 2000) may have produced a sharpening of the focus of participatory work.

Chapter 6: Case Studies: Stakeholder Perceptions

6.1   Introduction

This chapter describes three case studies that examine participation in practice, using the theoretical models of participation and policy proposed by Arnstein (1969), Hart (1997) and Levin (1997) to analyse the findings. The interviews with managers, elected members, front-line workers and young people in the three social work departments are compared and contrasted, to show how local and structural factors, and the different interests of the stakeholders, impact upon the development and implementation of policies for participation of young people.

The three case studies were chosen to include different types of local authority, geographical location and participatory practice.   All three authorities set out to involve young people in their departmental policy making.   Participation is now part of central government policy and the development of children's rights mean that young people have rights enshrined in the UNCRC to participate in decisions that affect them. Quality Protects initiatives and Children's Services Plans stress the need to include the views of young service users in the planning and policy making functions of social services departments, but the mode of participation is left to the discretion of individual departments (DoH 1998b; DoH 2001).

The case studies are an established London borough and two more recently constituted unitary local authorities. They are of diverse size, located in different parts of England and display differences in structure and organisational type found in local authorities.   The London borough (referred to as Our Borough) has existed in its present form since the Government of London Act (1963). One of the new unitary authorities (Our Town) resembles a county authority. It is predominantly rural but is centred on a large town, similar to a county town, where services are concentrated. The second unitary authority (Our City) was part of a large prosperous county until it was created in the latest reorganisation.

The cases were chosen from among authorities that completed the survey. The survey data provide a measure of triangulation alongside the stakeholder interviews that increases the level of reliability. The methods used to facilitate participation, and the perceptions of the process held by stakeholders, are the main focus in each case study. To maintain confidentiality the cases have been given fictitious names but a basic profile is provided at the beginning of the account of each case, containing the political and organisational context.

Each of the stakeholders expressed their perceptions in terms of their own experience. When they used the same words to convey meanings, it cannot be assumed that meanings are shared. For example, respondents did not use the word 'participation' with precision. Thus 'participation' in one case study can mean responding to a questionnaire; in another it may be face to face meetings with policy makers. Words such as consult, inform and involve were used by stakeholders, together with expressions such as 'to have a voice'. While such expressions indicate that there was a commitment to participation, they do not indicate precisely what participation amounted to, and certainly not how effective it was. In this analysis, the term 'participation' is used as a general term to include all kinds of involvement. To help bring some clarity, therefore, theoretical models are introduced to assess the nature of participation in each case.

6.2   Models of Participation

A widely used model of participation is that developed by Arnstein to categorise community development and other policy initiatives (Arnstein 1969). She calibrates the extent to which individuals and groups are able to exercise power to influence what happens in their communities. Her work is located in what other authors such as Lukes (1976) see as the complex power relationships operating in society in general and policy making in particular. Powerful groups such as industrialists or bureaucrats control processes and outcomes even when they purport to be sharing power. Arnstein devised a 'Ladder of Participation', a hierarchy built from 'manipulation' on the bottom rung, rising to 'citizen control' on the top.

"For illustrative purposes the eight types are arranged in a ladder pattern with each rung corresponding to the extent of citizen's power in determining the end product" (Arnstein 1969 p.217).
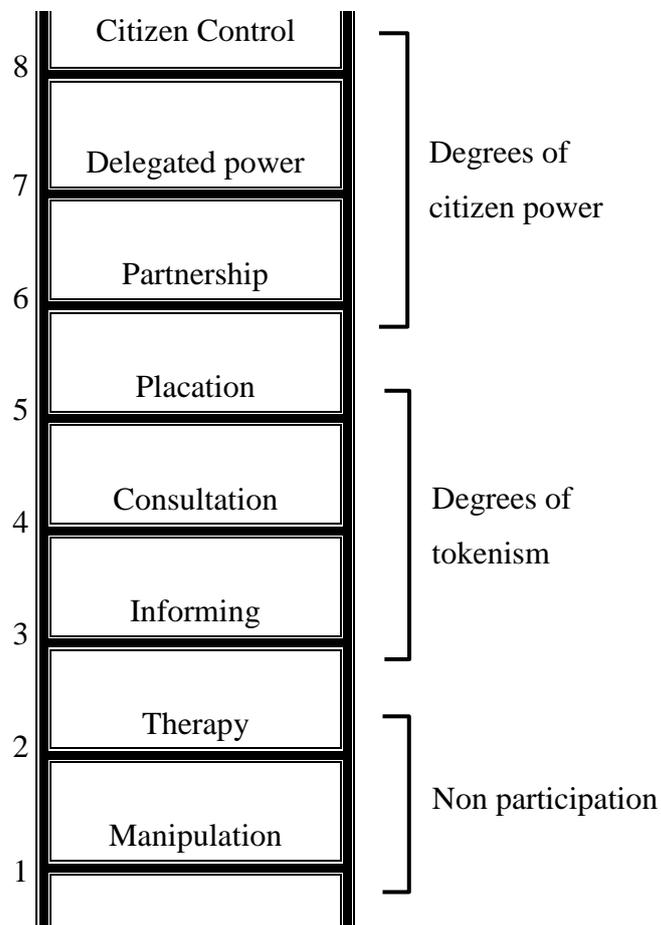
Figure 6.1 Eight Rungs on a Ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein 1969)

Arnstein's work dates from the 1960s and the problems she encountered in community development in the United States (Marris and Rein 1974; Loney 1983; Gyford 1991). She produced her "typology of citizen participation …using examples from three federal social programmes" (Arnstein 1969 p.217). The 'Ladder of Citizen Participation' offers a way of thinking about and analysing the degrees of power that groups of 'have-nots', the poor, the oppressed and the marginalised, can marshal to redress the inequalities they face. For Arnstein participation and power are inseparable:

> *citizen participation is a categorical term for citizen*
> *power. It is the redistribution of power that enables the*

'have-not' citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic process, to be deliberately included in the future

(Arnstein 1969 p.217).

Her view is that participation in the process of planning will unlock the power to shape the way that communities develop. The ladder is a way of showing what level of power a community group has, according to the approach taken to participation. The bottom of the ladder constitutes non-participation, rising through degrees of tokenism to degrees of citizen power. The higher up the ladder an activity appears the more power citizens have to shape decisions that are taken. Although conceptualised in a community development setting Arnstein regards the model as appropriate for use in other settings.

The underlying issues are essentially the same – 'nobodies' in several arenas are trying to become 'somebodies' with enough power to make the target institutions responsive to their views, aspirations, and needs

(Arnstein 1969 p.217).

As a group, young people who are looked after by social services departments, are among those most likely to be socially excluded, or 'nobodies' in Arnstein's terms. In educational and employment terms, more than 75% of care leavers have no academic qualifications of any kind and more than 50% of young people leaving care aged 16 years or over are unemployed. In terms of vulnerability, of the young women leaving care 17% are pregnant or are already mothers and 10% of 16-17 year old claimants of DSS severe hardship payments have been in care. 30% of young single homeless people have been in care. Crime statistics reveal that 23% of adult prisoners and 38% of young prisoners have been in care (DoH/SSI 1997).

While Arnstein's model is helpful in understanding participation generally, it does not focus specifically on the participation of children and young people. Engaging the participation of children rather than adults raises some

additional issues arising from the attitudes of adults, the relative powerlessness of children, and the development of young people's autonomy according to their age and maturity (McNeish 1999). The construction of young people as members of a socially excluded group that are 'looked after' or 'in need' does not imply that they are in a position to act collectively in their own interests, or that they share an identity, something which was fundamental to the development of disability and mental health campaigning groups (Barnes 1999). Unlike the disability movement, young people reject their involuntary identity as service users, because it is stigmatising. They want to 'normalise' their position in society and throw off the negative stereotype that has been associated with young people in care (Colton *et al*. 1997; Lindsay 1998; McCurry 1999).

There have been attempts to provide young people looked after with a collective voice. The National Association of Young People In Care (NAYPIC) began in Leeds in the 1970s with a small group of young people meeting together to voice their experiences as young people in care. It developed into a national campaigning group, receiving funding from the Department of Health (Stein and Frost 1992), but collapsed in the mid-1990s because of infighting and power struggles between different parts of the organisation (Hayden *et al*. 1999; McCurry 1999).

The newly constituted National Voice Project aims to organise young people who are in care or who have been in care to provide a national voice in child care policy (Broad 1998). It was established with government funding by First Key and the National Children's Bureau. As a user-led organisation it is developing a campaigning role, but it has not yet fully established itself. The intention is that it should provide a national forum to discuss the issues that are important to young people looked after. It will have direct links to central government with the potential to create good practice in social services departments. While some young stakeholders in the case studies were aware of the National Voice Project, it had made no impact on the way that departments relate to young people. Each department was working out its own distinct relationship with young service users.

Hart (1997) takes some of these issues into account in reformulating Arnstein's ladder to apply specifically to young people. He refines Arnstein's ladder and locates it in the theory and practice of involving young citizens in community development and environmental care. For each of the rungs on the ladder he gives examples that can be directly related to the work young people do in social services policy making. His intention is not to prescribe an appropriate level, but to create a model that can be used to differentiate between diverse activities. Hart helps categorise how different approaches to involving young people can be compared in terms of the level of participation (or empowerment). His reformulation divides Arnstein's ladder into two sections: degrees of participation and non-participation.

Child-initiated, shared decisions with adults	
Child-initiated and directed	Degrees of participation
Adult-initiated, shared decisions with children	
Consulted and informed	
Assigned but informed	
Tokenism	
Decoration	Non-participation
Manipulation or Deception	
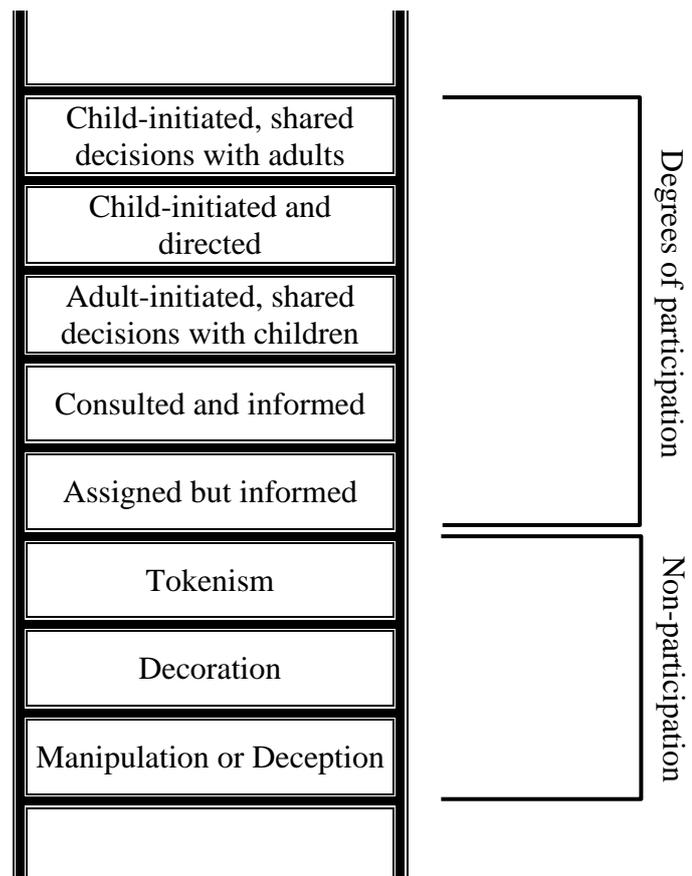
Figure 6.2 The Ladder of Children's Participation (Hart 1997)

McNeish makes the point that within many health and social care settings full empowerment may be neither feasible nor desirable for young people.

Honest and realistic parameters for participation need to be set according to the nature of decisions to be made, and Hart's reformulation of Arnstein's ladder provides a basis for setting them (McNeish 1999). McNeish gives an illuminating commentary, with examples, on Hart which is worth summarising.

Manipulation or Deception, the lowest rung on the ladder, refers to those instances where adults consciously use children's voices to carry their own messages. Deception is more common. It refers to those instances where adults, with good intentions, deny their own involvement in a project with children because they want others to think that it was done entirely by children. *Decoration* occurs when children wear costumes or T-shirts, or other symbols, promoting a cause but have little notion of what the cause is and no involvement in its organising. *Tokenism* most often occurs when adults are keen to give children a voice, but have not thought through the implications carefully. Examples include involving a small number of children at an adult conference where little or no attempt has been made to adapt the proceedings to suit them, or having children sit on adult panels or committees where they are isolated from, and have little or no opportunity to consult, their peers. Tokenism occurs when children perform a symbolic function without their views making a difference to the process or decisions taken.

The upper rungs on Hart's ladder represent models of genuine participation. By *assigned but informed,* Hart refers to activities where children are assigned their roles by adults who define the activities to be undertaken. This is a 'top down' approach where adults set the agenda and children are given their part to play. Where projects are designed and run by adults, but children understand the process and are consulted and have their opinions treated seriously, Hart categorises the activity as one where children are *consulted and informed. Adult-initiated, shared decisions with children* involve sharing decisions between adults and children at all stages of the process from planning and design, to implementation and evaluation. Control of the agenda, however, remains with adults.

Child-initiated and child directed activities, by contrast, are not controlled by adults, but the young people may not share decision making that affects them directly. Examples of these are hard to find, but can include groups of children getting together to raise money for charity or put on an art display for friends. In *child-initiated, shared decisions with adults*, as Hart comments, children and young people are often aware that they need to get support from sympathetic and influential adults for their ideas to succeed. The challenge for adults in these situations is to resist the tendency to take over projects themselves.

When using the Arnstein and Hart models of participation it is clear that I am not comparing like with like, but each has its own particular usefulness in analysing the cases studied. In particular, Arnstein's view of partnership and of the trust which is required to build it, is tested in the interview data. Arnstein/Hart's models can be operationalised in many policy frameworks. The version developed by Levin, with its emphasis on intent and the exercise of power is particularly useful. He is concerned with the capacity of certain actors or groups to exercise three different types of power (Levin, 1997). As Levin explains:

> *If we look for common elements, we find that power is mostly regarded as a capacity, or ability. But 'power' in that sense of a capacity, may be seen as denoting one of three different things,* power to do, power over *and* power to achieve

> (Levin 1997 p.54).

In the current research context, which is largely concerned with implementation these three meanings are interpreted in the following ways:

The *power to do,* "literally, something that he or she is actually able to do – although this is not an unfettered power" (Levin 1997 p.55). The power of an individual to make decisions alone is available but limited by the nature of the workings of the local state. Although social workers acting as agents of social work organisations operate devolved decision making, they work inside professional supervision, agency audit and inspection processes. The setting of the local state is based on a group, team or collective approach to

decision making. The director of a department, while accountable for the decisions she/he makes, does not generally make decisions without reference to the elected members who oversee and ratify policy. Similarly the chair of a Social Services Committee does not generally act without the support of other elected members.

Power over, that is, the power of individual or group A over individual or group B, can be associated with service providers, in this case social workers and social work managers, who can determine what happens to a young person**.** Other research has shown that service users are unwilling to criticise the services they receive for fear that the service may be withdrawn (Shelton 1999). In the case of young people, the social worker is also the most active part of their corporate parent and exercises legal *power over,* and responsibility, for the young person. *Power over* is seldom referred to in discourse on participation in child care, but it remains a potentially important element of the discourse.

The *power to achieve,* to realise one's will to determine that a policy and/or measure will incorporate at least some characteristics desired by the power holder, is associated with policy making and is central to this study. In Arnstein's terms the tokenistic level of the ladder implies some limitation on power, but no transfer (this may be welcome to all participants and 'reasonable'). A transfer of power (empowering the user) begins with partnership and, by definition, control is lost as power is transferred.

Power over and *power to achieve* in Levin's terms are used to assess how much power young people exercise when they participate in policy making and how power is used by the other stakeholders. The ladders of participation are useful in assessing how much influence young people exert on the policy process, by examining the activities they participate in and how, in Levin's terms power is exercised. They are conceptual yardsticks that can be applied in each of the case studies to assess the integrity of different activities or attitudes towards participation. Hart's refinement of Arnstein's ladder is particularly useful because it takes account of young people's position in society, and is therefore a better guide to the influence

they may have (Hart 1997). Taken together, Arnstein, Hart and Levin provide useful tools to assess young people's power to influence policy in the cases studied.

6.3   Case Study: Our Borough

Our Borough is a London borough that came into being in 1965. At the time of the study the political composition of the council was:

Conservative	21 seats
Liberal Democrat	19 seats
Labour	10 seats

The Social Services Committee comprised:

Conservative members	5
Liberal Democrat members	5
Labour members	3

It is described as "A pleasant residential area with the amenities of [a major river] and splendid open parkland close at hand…it is also a thriving commercial and shopping centre, and supports a number of light industries" (Municipal Year Book).

Stakeholders described it as:

> *Quite a built up area, quite good really, a lot of traffic. There are places to go and things to do, like the cinema or lots of shops…quite a busy town. (Young Person 1)*

> *There are areas of Our Borough that are reasonably affluent but… I would think [Our Borough] is probably … lower middle class. (Elected Member 1)*

> *A green and leafy borough. (Principal Officer)*

All of the stakeholders interviewed in Our Borough presented in a relaxed fashion. Respondents seemed happy to talk about the department without concern that their comments would cause them problems, or that they would be giving the 'wrong' message about the department to an outsider. Our Borough council displayed the characteristics of a mature, reflective

organisation that had confidence in its policy of participation. The managers were able to place the work they were doing on participation in a wider context, and to see that it would develop in ways that were influenced by all of the actors involved in the process, rather than just the management group. They acknowledged that, although they had methods in place to listen to young people, they were not always good at acting on what they were told. The managers were confident, relaxed and open in their discussions of participation and reflected on the issues during interviews. They gave no sign of wanting to control the young people through surveillance of the research interviews, nor did they articulate their policies as management presentations. This suggests that they had come to realise that sharing power is an important element of participation, and that young people needed freedom to think about issues before contributing to decision making.

Our Borough started their participation with young people in 1992 and the focus of their work was the implementation of the Children Act 1989. They organised a conference at the town hall to explain to young people looked after what the Act would mean to them.

> *Early on it was about elements of choice of placement about foster care or about residential care… at that stage it was early in the life of the Children's Act that was implemented in October 1991, and this took place in 1992, so it was trying to make sure that young people knew about the provisions of the Children's Act. (Principal Officer)*

6.3.1 Managers' perspective

Of the managers in child care, the Principal Officer organised the inaugural participation conference and was moved to do this by his own convictions.

> *I think there is a strong sense that we want to consult with young people and involve them…. I think it wasn't young people driven, it was much more about managers being sensitive and committed to this style of work…. I got a lot of support from Senior Management …that was actually the right thing to do. (Principal Officer)*

Similar conferences were held every two years aimed at young people looked after aged 12 years and above. These conferences were associated

with a series of events that involved younger people and foster carers. They were used to inform young people about new departmental arrangements such as the statutory reviewing process, or changes in legislation. Front-line workers were involved in these events and described the approaches coordinated by the Principal Officer.

> *Well we do various things. Sometimes when young people leave care, we send out questionnaires, just to find out what they think of the service. We also have had several events where you bring in young people, whether it's informal or formal, we have had some of both where food has been laid on and various things, and you get feed back from them. (Front-Line Worker – Leaving Care)*

The Principal Officer also used outside agencies to facilitate and help young people to express their views, which came through him to the rest of the child care division.

> *We asked Barnardo's training unit to arrange it. The second one was the United Nations people [The Children's Rights Development Unit] and the third one we went to our own training section. (Principal Officer)*

After three conferences, the Principal Officer started to feel that he was setting the agenda for participation and not enabling young people to raise issues that were important to them. He wanted to move to a more proactive style and initiate a regular dialogue with them. Young people had been given information, but not an opportunity to participate or influence decision-making. In Hart's schema, the young people were consulted and informed, but because they did not share or initiate decisions, the Principal Officer was exercising *power over* them. It was consultative but did not build the partnership necessary to constitute *power to achieve*. The Principal Officer had also noted that the numbers of young people attending the conferences was a very small percentage of those looked after or receiving services (15-20 from a looked after population of 200). His observations and conclusions are similar to researchers like Pithouse and Williamson who have examined young people's relationship with public policy makers:

If young people do not feel that they are a part, and/or they cannot play a part, if they do not feel that there is a benefit to them on criteria which only they can choose, then they will 'vote with their feet' and spend their time elsewhere

(Pithouse and Williamson 1997 p.109).

These factors led the Principal Officer to change his approach, and to work with the training manager to involve young people at earlier stages in the decision making process. This was achieved by working with a small group of young people who had shown interest in policy making at the conferences. Together, managers and young people decided how the young people wanted to be involved in assessing and developing a case review process. Rather than start from the department's focus on the way that reviews were conducted, the group started from the experiences that the young people had of the looked after system. A representative from the 'Who Cares Trust' (an organisation dedicated to helping young people express their views about the care system) was invited to these meetings to act as an advocate and facilitator.

Because we wanted to have somebody there that the young people could relate to... what we want to talk about is what it is like being a person that is looked after and how it feels for us to be involved in the decision making process. (Training Manager)

Material produced in these meetings was then used to train childcare managers responsible for reviews. So, although the managers decided on the issues to be addressed, young people were involved at an early stage in deciding how the process would operate and how they wished to be involved, if at all. In Hart's terms, this was an adult initiated, shared decision with children.

The training manager's contact with young people was a salutary experience for him. He had felt that the department was reasonably successful in helping young people express themselves in their regular review meetings. The consultation transformed his view.

[He] was appalled really that it [the review process] was

such a negative experience for kids and …[he]… wanted to find out why. Was it actually that we weren't doing what we should be doing, was it that we were doing what we should be doing but it wasn't being perceived as being particularly helpful… (Training Manager)

These experiences were confirmed by feedback from young people, as reported by the Principal Officer.

We do a lot of listening, but then we sometimes disregard all that we have heard and we need to, if we are going to be a listening organisation, we have got to act on what we hear, rather than listening and then ignoring. (Principal Officer)

This evidence challenged the managers' perceptions that they were providing a sensitive and responsive service.

A participatory initiative took place a few days before the stakeholder interviews were conducted. Front-line workers and managers invited older young people (aged 12 or over) to a barbecue at a local social work office. While there a youth worker from an independent employment project that works with social services spoke to them individually.

She isn't kind of necessarily tarnished with the social services brush. (Principal Officer)

She discussed with the young people what they thought of the services they were receiving and their responses to the imminent government initiative Quality Protects. They were also surveyed about four key issues about leaving care services and as to how they wanted to be involved in future departmental decision making.

The Principal Officer identified several key issues. He thought that participation needed to be proactive rather than responsive and noted that it 'drops off' the agenda and needed effort to keep it at the forefront. Although participation is one aspect of the department's work, it is hard pressed by other tasks. Consultation was seen as a response to specific issues such as changes in government policy, and needed more ownership and enthusiasm

which did not come naturally from people in the department. Young people were unhappy about frequent changes in social worker and youth workers were seen by managers as able to get along side young people better than social workers.

There is a sense of evolution and development of the participatory process in Our Borough, as those involved learn more about what they are doing and develop a more reflective approach. Different factors come into play in the development and maturation of the process. Original aims were re-assessed in the light of experience, and then redrawn in the light of changing expectations. When the Principal Officer realised that a conference places young people in a passive, receptive role, he re-designed the strategy to include them earlier in the process. Although he did not articulate it, we can see the implicit influence of a children's rights perspective, which stresses young people's active participation in decisions. The Principal Officer did not isolate himself from his peers; he worked with professionals to raise their awareness of children's human rights and the need to involve them in decisions. To avoid tokenism and empower young people they need to help set the agenda and be involved throughout the decision-making processes. Although in setting the framework for participation the Principal Officer retains *power over* the other stakeholders, his change in approach signals an attempt at partnership working and to the *power to achieve* (Levin 1997).

Bringing in people from outside the department who had experience of working with young people and who were ideologically sympathetic to their empowerment – such as Gerrison Lansdown of The Children's Rights Development Unit – helped the Principal Officer re-design his approach. Entertainment and free food offered at the conferences in 1992 did not attract and hold the attention of the range of young people that are needed to make participation work. The task was made more difficult by the numbers of young people who were placed outside the borough and have to travel a considerable distance to participate. In order, therefore, to attract a cross section of young people in participation the Principal Officer learnt the need to be creative in the choice of modes. No single approach could suit the diverse history, background, identity, location or expectation of the

diverse group of young people who are looked after. He also came to understand the importance of starting participation with issues that are important to young people rather than issues that are important to managers. Such a respect for different interests is the basis for dialogue and partnership.

6.3.2   Elected members' perspective

The elected members in Our Borough saw young people's involvement in similar terms to involvement in the political process and were in favour of it because they felt it helped to develop a sense of citizenship and social responsibility.

> *I suppose it was just an extension of the existing work, other areas of the community were represented but there never really seems to be any representation for young people and they're obviously citizens of the future, so we felt that they needed to… they were being left out and they needed that involvement, if they wanted it. (Elected Member 1)*

They were aware that society's view of young people had changed and that young people are able to take a role in decisions about their own lives and about wider community issues.

> *I think that young people now are more sophisticated than they were… I think that from sort of secondary school age… that's the point where we need to try and alter that relationship with young people and try and get them involved. (Elected Member 2)*

> *I think that as time has gone on, the impression I have had has certainly changed, that the young people are much more closely involved in how the services that affect them are run. Their views are listened to a lot more. (Elected Member 2)*

However, although Elected Member 2 perceived this, he gave no direct evidence to support his views. Elected members comments to the open questions posed were general rather than specific. They did not refer to the activities discussed by managers and I infer, therefore, that they did not have details of them. Elected members said that they did not view young people

who are looked after differently from other young people in the community, in that they should all participate in decisions that affect them.

> *I think that any service user, no matter what that service is, should be involved somewhere in the formulation of the policy for that service, because after all they are the ones that are using it and they are the ones who know what is needed. I think that a group of service users could quite sensibly be formed as a sub-committee to the social services committee, to not so much as to advise but obviously to give their point of view. (Elected Member 1)*

However, Elected Member 1 added that being looked after usually implies that these particular young people may have substantial problems to deal with that may be more pressing on their time than involvement in the political process in general, or in departmental policy making in particular.

> *Those that have been in and out of care and have a real history of a troubled childhood, those sorts of young people, I think, would not be interested at all because they end up just only out for themselves, they are only concerned about themselves really and I should think, certainly the ones I know, the last thing they would be concerned about is formulating policy on how the service is delivered to other kids. (Elected Member 1)*

This begs the question in relation to departmental policy making that young people's problems may be related to policy and practice. It indicates the tendency to pathologise young people by ignoring structural issues and reinforces a narrow professionalism. The elected members' view tends towards paternalism or of the social structural child (James *et al*. 1998). Managers, front-line workers and other adults take decisions because young people already have enough to cope with without concerning themselves with the way departments are run. Young people are only involved as apprentice citizens. While supporting the concept of young people's participation, elected members recognised their own limited ability to ensure participation took place. Elected Member 2 recognised that practical power was in managers' purview.

> *I think there is very little I can do other than make suggestions, other than badger the managers to ensure*

that these changes take place. What I would hate to see happen is a situation where I would have to say 'I told you so'. (Elected Member 2)

The implication is that whilst they have concerns, elected members have little power to ensure that these are addressed.

6.3.3 Front-line workers' perspective

Front-line workers in Our Borough reported that they had regular formal and informal contact with senior managers when they visited the department's headquarters in the town hall and when managers visited the social work offices where they worked. They expressed confidence that information or ideas that they had would be listened to by the department and acted upon. A front-line worker on being asked if she thought her opinion would influence service provision, said that she thought that "they [management] would listen" "and cited examples of her involvement in… the initial policy, drawing up the [leaving care] policy…".

Although two front-line workers were interviewed, only one of them – Front-Line Worker Leaving Care – had a working knowledge of young people's participation. She had been directly involved in working with them at the conferences and subsequent activities where they expressed their views.

> *Well, we do various things, sometimes when young people leave care we send out questionnaires, just to find out what they think of the service. We also in [Our Borough] have had several events where you bring in young people, whether it's informal or formal. We've had some of both ... sometimes in group situations, sometimes individually. (Front-Line Worker – Leaving Care)*

Front-Line Worker Reviewing Officer expressed support for participation and was in regular contact with managers and young people, but did not see her role as a reviewing officer as being directly related to participation in policy making. She wanted to see the voice of young people exert a greater influence in the review process but was not really confident that this would

happen. Although she collected the views of young people in individual case reviews, these were not collated or fed into the policy making process. The opportunity to enhance the culture of participation was missed. Whilst Our Borough as a whole seemed to be a positive and proactive authority in respect of participation, not everyone was aware of the work that was going on in the department, nor realised how their own work could contribute to the acceptance of young people's participation in all aspects of their lives. The dissemination of the policy among front-line workers was incomplete.

6.3.4 Young people's perspective

Young people saw participation as a part of their experience of social services.

> *Everyone should have a say, everyone's got the same rights, so everyone. Obviously if they are too young then they can't but there are things you can talk with them, tell them what you feel, what you think, so everyone should have their say. (Young Person 1)*

They were used to being consulted on a range of issues:

> *I have always been involved in getting young persons' view on things, they always call on me. All loads of different types of things, like review meetings, there was a big issue about that, about how they run them. (Young Person 1)*

They also felt able to contact managers if they had a particular issue they wanted to resolve.

> *Just ring them up and tell them…I know everyone in the chain of social services, so I could phone them up and say, look listen to my ideas. (Young Person 2)*

It was part of their experience to be consulted and they had been involved since they were quite young.

> *I have been in care since I was four, so as soon as I could write, really, as soon as I could understand what they were saying, really, it's all the time it's constant [that she has been involved]. (Young Person 1)*

Young people valued the range of modes used to gather their views, which included questionnaires, group meetings, informal events such as barbecues and contact with a range of staff members – both managers and front-line workers – and with representatives of outside agencies who canvassed their views. They recognised that no one method suited all young people.

> *Obviously there are lots of shy people, people with not so much confidence as those that can just come out with their ideas and views. Probably [the best way] is by questionnaire because then they haven't actually got to talk to anyone, say face to face which could be a problem for them. (Young Person 1)*

> *Kids are going to respond differently to different people speaking in different ways but for some kids to tell you how they are feeling sitting in a room to like your social worker, your Chair, your foster parents, may not be the right way ... some people can cope with that .. they can put ideas clear in their head ... but other people can't. (Young Person 2)*

> *Quite a few people are coming down or they would like to speak to you to find out the young person's views and that ... they are all right, and then they send you a letter as well ... saying who they are and that, and they say we will give you a tenner to do this alright. (Young Person 2)*

Whilst different modes gave an opportunity to those not confident enough to speak in group settings and to those in isolated fostering and lodgings placements outside the borough to participate at some level, personal interaction was recognised as an important feature of participation.

> *Speaking to people in a less formal way when you are younger I think is a big thing, I know I used to hate those meetings, I just felt like I didn't have a voice at the end of it. (Young Person 2)*

Commenting on who has the power to make changes, Young Person 2 stated that whilst managers had the power they needed facts from the younger people. The young people did not refer to – or display – any form of group identity or state any desire to get together and radicalise the way they related to social services. The young people interviewed were aware that for many

young people who are looked after, the adult structures offered them for participation were unsuitable and limited their opportunity to express their voice effectively. Whilst they welcomed the chance to be involved, the work in Our Borough can be ranked by Hart's assessment as *adult-initiated, shared decisions* and given the level of trust, *partnership* in Arnstein's. Young people's experiences were related to responses they made to social services initiatives, rather than user led initiatives. The relationship they had with the department seemed individualised rather than one group with power negotiating with another.

6.3.5 Commentary on Our Borough

In Our Borough participation was management-led but the prime mover, the Principal Officer, expressed his desire for young people's voice to be at the core of policy making and had pursued his aim for seven years prior to stakeholder interviews. The interviews indicate that the Principal Officer and Training Manager were the only stakeholders who had an overview of participation in the department. The Principal Officer was proactive and he was able to motivate others with his vision of young people's participation. He set the direction of policy and the other stakeholders had to work within the framework he had set. Despite the failure of one of the front-line workers to develop the policy in her practice, he was successful. Much of the success of participation resides in the vision and enthusiasm of the Principal Officer. There is sympathy towards participation in the department but if he were to leave it is not clear who would carry his work forward. His knowledge, combined with his power to make decisions were crucial elements of the department's strategy. He was able to reflect on the chronology of participatory work in Our Borough. Other stakeholders, including the training manager, commented on young people's involvement from their own narrower positions without being aware of the complex history and full potential for participation in the department. Of the three case studies it was in Our Borough that young people had most opportunity to assume some power through participation. This commentary explores their potential.

Measured against Hart's model this department started out with a participation strategy that was predominantly *tokenistic*. Young people were asked what they thought about issues but they did not decide on issues or have any idea if their opinions were acted upon. The participatory framework had been decided for them, with an unrepresentative number of young people engaging in a process designed and controlled by adults. As the managers gained experience, their strategy changed to include young people earlier in the policy making process and let them contribute to setting agendas and shape the context of discussion. The young people understood more about participation because it was located in their own experiences. They decided when and if they wanted to be involved and why. The managers respected their views and used them to train other managers. Our Borough was developing its approach to participation and its increasing experience, mainly vested in managers, was taking the young people from a *tokenistic* activity, through *assigned but informed* towards *adult-initiated shared decisions*. All adult stakeholders supported participation and felt that young people's opinions should be treated seriously. However, the practice of participation was not a complete organisational culture because, although everyone supported it in principle, not all stakeholders were applying it in practice.

Participation is about sharing power, with each group making its own distinct contribution within a partnership. It is not necessarily a harmonious process. As Barnes has argued:

> *The various purposes of involvement held by users, professionals and managers start to emerge as the experience of involvement develops. While some of these different purposes may be capable of being met in a complementary manner, others are likely to be in conflict. A strategy for involvement needs to make explicit the various purposes to be served and to enable negotiation to take place around these*

(Barnes 1997 p.88).

The opening up of policy making to include the views of young people who had been given the opportunity to share experiences and present a considered position, is a move towards Arnstein's model of sharing power.

Although it was discarded by Hart in favour of the notion of shared decisions, *partnership* is the first rung of Arnstein's ladder that constitutes citizen power. However it is not yet a partnership of equals, but the beginning of a process that could lead to the development of such a partnership. A requirement for development is that the young people develop their own vision. This might be based on the rights they have under the UNCRC, their role as consumers of social services and the desire of the government that this voice is included in planning and policy under Quality Protects and Best Value legislation. A constraint on young people and adult stakeholders is the presence of statutory intervention.

Young people can be invited into policy-making arenas but to move themselves up the ladder of participation they have to start to take power and not to wait for it to be passed to them. Croft and Beresford discuss this paradox of participation. "As people involved in community, rights, disability and user groups quickly learn from experience, power is generally not something that is handed over or can be given. It has to be taken" (Croft and Beresford 1992 p.38).

While there was no evidence that Our Borough had specifically acknowledged such a potential conflict, there was no feeling from those charged with service delivery and its political oversight that participation would lead to a loss of control or conflict. Rather, there was a belief that the diversity of view provided by young service users could be accommodated by a holistic, complete or natural approach to policy-making that accepts that every stakeholder has a part to play but these parts and their responsibilities will be different. In other words, managers should manage, elected members should develop policy and scrutinise its implementation, front-line workers should implement policy and practice decisions and young people should have a view on the services they receive and a voice to influence decisions that are taken.

The managers in Our Borough are not able to give power away, but they have started to support young people and provide opportunities for development.

There are four essential elements to support. These are:

personal development*: to increase people's expectations, assertiveness, self-confidence and self esteem;*

skill development*: to build the skills they need to participate and to develop their own approaches to involvement;*

practical support*: to be able to take part, including information, child care, transport, meeting places, advocacy etc.;*

support for people to get together and work in groups*: including administrative expenses, payment for workers, training and development costs.*

(Croft and Beresford 1992 p39 - 40).

This skill and support enables young people to be more effective stakeholders in the policy process but does not compensate for their lack of power in the agency itself. Commenting on service provision and having views taken into account is not the same as the power to change the way they are looked after. These factors were echoed in Our City where front-line workers said that being listened to is not the same as being heard or having the power to bring about change.

Underpinning this support was the ideology that participating with service users is the right thing to do. Inviting other stakeholders to contribute to the process of policy making facilitates development, without denying the responsibilities of managers and elected members to work within government and bureaucratic constraints. All of the groups said that they wanted effective services for young people and how these were provided is the subject of a developing dialogue.

I think people respond positively when they are asked to try and engage other people and do it quite well but it's not built into people's everyday way of working, and I suppose what I have got to do now is make sure that we do develop the structures to enable us to perhaps have our own dialogue with young people, which I think we do intermittently, we could do better. (Manager)

Participation in Our Borough was about managers and elected members listening to the various participants in the process and developing policy to accommodate their needs within the organisational response. Young people did not have to be responsible for service to have a part in shaping it.

The Principal Officer's relaxed and frank account of his efforts to involve young people in the workings of his department indicated that he was able to work with the tensions generated by being responsible for service delivery, while at the same time involving young people in how service would be delivered. He reflected on his personal history of participation and saw it as a learning process through which he developed his original ideas and tried new modes. He identified the changing balance of power between service users and service providers as an important factor in the way he thought of his job and his relationship with the young people looked after. When he started the participatory activities they were supported by other members of his management group and fitted well with the overall culture of the department, but they were not a requirement of legislation or a government practice directive. His view was that participation is learned and should be an active and exciting process that needs to be worked out and developed through shared experience. He did not claim that present arrangements were the best they could be, but that they would continue to develop and include more influence from young people.

This department is reaching out to young people and has tried to engage with them in the way it develops its services. Its participatory strategy has moved from conferences and questionnaires to meetings with managers and the development of a dialogue that has changed the way that it conducts its statutory revie*ws*. In Arnstein's terms participation has moved from *informing* and *consultation* (*tokenism*) to the early stages of partnership (degree of citizen power). In Hart's terms the shift has been from *tokenistic* non-participation to *adult-initiated shared decisions*. The final say on policy remains with managers, but young people do seem to have been able to exercise some *power to achieve* and effect a change in review policy. It is not clear that young people appreciate the basis for their participation nor that they would have initiated it had they not been invited by managers.

The department has held to their commitment of encouraging participation and none of the stakeholders was proposing anything but an increase in the influence of young people in the future. *Power over* is located with the Principal Officer whose access to information, personal vision and validated organisational position meant that he could determine how participation developed. His support and permission are key features of this case's successful participatory development. He is using his *power to do* to translate the policy to one of partnership and sharing the *power to achieve*. This implies that he remains in a strong position to influence participation until young people understand and can operationalise their *power to achieve*.

6.4   Case Study: Our Town

Our Town came into being in 1996 in the local government re-organisations that created the new unitary authorities. At the time of the study its political composition was:

Labour	35 seats
Conservative	7 seats

The social services committee was made up of:

Labour Members	14
Conservative Members	3

The Municipal Year Book describes the authority as "centred on Our Town …[its population] lives in urban areas. Much of the area is rural, but there are significant areas of industry, primarily steel, oil refineries, manufacturing and pool/wharf facilities."

Stakeholders' descriptions focused on this urban centre:

> *We call it the polo effect because you have got the urban area of Our Town surrounded by a fairly large rural area. You can travel from the north … to the furthest south-west and it's nearly 100 miles. (Elected Member – Chair of Social Services)*

> *there has been a lot of regeneration and a lot of money put into it recently from the government. (Front-Line Worker 1)*

Work to involve young people looked after in Our Town pre-dated its constitution as a unitary authority in 1997. Previously part of a large county, the new authority was formed by the amalgamation of three borough councils with district level responsibilities and staff transferred from the county to the new unitary authority. Participatory initiatives started in the 'county days' were continued and developed in the new unitary structure and some continuity of staff and work practices indicate a level of continuity from the old department to the new one. However the change in status gave the management group the opportunity to re-design and re-focus the services they were delivering. They produced a mission statement that included the intention to be 'a listening authority'. This declaration of general principles of operation led to a desire to listen to young people as users of services. The management group also drew up a very early Quality Protects strategy (1998) and were about to be inspected by a Joint Review team at the time of the stakeholder interviews. Both of these government initiatives, one regulatory and the other inspectorial, have requirements that social services have mechanisms in place to hear what young people have to say about the services they receive.

The department had an upbeat feel. Staff were positive about working there. Managers were enthusiastic and businesslike and keen to express their commitment to producing high quality services. Their energy seemed to set the tone for the department as a whole and employees and elected members vigorously promoted the work they were doing and the bright future they felt the department had.

> *I think we've made [Our Town] social services, probably one of the best in the world, strangely enough we have had some quite interesting phone calls from European countries, particularly on the child care stuff. (Elected Member – Chair of Social Services)*
>
> *We have been a little bit spoilt because right from the very beginning Our Town members made it clear that they are accessible, they were supportive and I think that*

the massive change Our Town has been able to actually make has actually been a partnership between the directorates and the members and certainly something I would never have experienced ... in the old county. (Manager – Child Care)

During the short time they had been operating the department had used a range of participatory modes with the young people they looked after and for whom they provided services. These were a positive incentive scheme that young people in residential care had helped to develop, development of an anti-theft, anti-bullying strategy, formulation of a leaving care group of young people to develop the work of an outreach team and development of a permanent consultation group of young people. Some of these built on initiatives that had been started under the old county structure.

It [involving young people] was on the back of the push around 'Quality Assurance' [a management initiative inspired by commercial business practice to include the customer in product development and delivery to ensure quality] and getting service users' views, staff's views, managers' views to develop services and to plan and develop for the future...I guess in the previous authority it never really progressed into anything more than collecting individual views and giving an initial direction at grass roots level. (Manager – Child Care)

Feedback was given to members of specific consultation groups and to young people looked after by a regular newsletter to residential homes. Open days were arranged for adult carers and elected members but no comment was made in interviews as to young people's attendance at these events.

6.4.1 Managers' perspective

In interviews, the managers articulated their policies like management presentations, in contrast to the relaxed, informal style of Our Borough. They also opted to be interviewed together, which reinforced the impression of the department presenting itself as cohesive. The structured, management driven approach fitted with the development of Children's Services Plans. These were being introduced at the time of stakeholder interviews, and managers referred to the need for them to address these central government

requirements. The government requires all social services departments to produce plans and has strengthened requirements to consult with service users in Quality Protects and Best Value. These developments encouraged managers to involve service users in planning, and to promote user empowerment. Initiatives included residential care, where the point was made that:

> *... they [young people] have actually got a part to play in planning initiatives like positive incentive schemes, then there is more investment in terms of making it work. (Principal Officer)*

Manager (Child Care) organised a survey of young people based on service exit interviews with young people leaving care. This aimed to find out what types of support services young people leaving care wanted and was to be used in planning the work of the newly established Youth Support Team, *consulted and informed* in Hart's terms. The team helped and supervised young people living independently or going through the Youth Courts. The same manager convened a small group of young people to consider positive incentives and anti-theft and anti-bullying strategies and hoped that these young people would form the core of a permanent consultation group to advise on other areas of departmental practice. Young people had also been invited to meet council sub-committees and the Joint Review Panel who were operating in the department at the time of the stakeholder interviews. In Arnstein's model, these activities can be seen as *consultation*. A previous youth council that operated in the old county structure collapsed when elected members vetoed its proposals for change.

The managers were clear about their strategies and cited the example of an anti-theft and anti-bullying policy that they were working on with their embryonic core group, over a three/four month time scale. They wanted young people to be part of their policy making and see the results of it. They saw this as an advance on their pre-reorganisation initiatives. However, they still controlled the agenda, and determined which young people attended groups, restricting opportunities to *consulted and informed*.

> *There had been a youth council put together [in the previous authority] and where they had actually*

> *consulted and proposed something and it was vetoed by the main council.   If you like and that was the bit that drove me to say, if we are going to consult people, then it's got to make a difference ... If it's tokenism then there is no point in doing it. (Principal Officer)*

The managers were also striving to produce a partnership between young people and the front-line workers in terms of planning the work that they were doing.

> *I think staff feel more confident around what they are doing with young people, if the young people have been involved in actually planning it in the first place and that's something I think I've picked up and seen evidenced over a period of a number of different initiatives, that it empowers the staff, it actually brings them, it enters the staff and the young people into a different relationship .... (Manager – Child Care)*

As with Our Borough, it was the managers who were the main source of information about participation in the department. Their level of knowledge was far greater than the other stakeholders interviewed, but unlike Our Borough they had yet to experience initiatives losing momentum and the need to rethink their strategy to cope with this. Participation was an expanding area of their work and was seen as one of a range of initiatives they were using to devise, control and deliver services. The impetus for participation came from a systematic approach to management. Individual or professional motivation was subordinated to changing government expectations. Quality Protects (legislation designed to protect young people looked after from abuse and improve services) and Best Value (legislation promoting efficient delivery and effective targeting of services and children's services plans) both have a consultation component, which brings participation firmly into management responsibility and regulatory inspection and monitoring.

> *I guess in terms of low level service user involvement, I think that was something driven through practitioners and through service users wanting to do things better, I guess in terms of the real big drive, I mean that's come from government in terms of children's services planning, Quality Protects etc. (Manager – Child Care)*

Whilst the rhetoric of the managers was inclusive, an examination of their activities showed that they retained *power to do*, *power over* and *power to achieve* in the department's participatory activities. While responding to central government initiatives they set the agenda and decided how issues were addressed.

6.4.2   Elected members' perspective

Both elected members were in favour of young people being involved in policy making, citing government initiatives as the driving force.

> *I've got to be honest and say the push initially has come
> from the government. (Elected Member 2)*

They thought inviting young people to council meetings would be a good way for their voice be heard, a *tokenistic* activity. They stressed the importance of communication and establishing a dialogue with young people, but when pressed for details of the work described by managers, had limited knowledge of the initiatives pursued inside the department or their potential effect on decision making. They did not know if or how information was fed back to young people who had been involved giving their views in policy making, but like the front-line workers, assumed that it was.

> *I personally haven't [got information] because – I might
> be wrong on this – but I don't think that elected members
> are actually involved in the exit interviews. Now it could
> be that the Chair of Social Services is, but I haven't got
> that information. (Elected Member 2)*

When charged to explain how young people's concerns identified in exit interviews are addressed at council level, Elected Member 2 gave a rather ambivalent reply: "Well obviously we would have to take them on board, take them away, look long and hard to see how these issues can be addressed" but she was unable to explain what or how this would happen.

The Chair of the Social Services Committee appeared to be aware of the potential dangers of certain modes of hearing the voice of young people. As with the Principal Officer's comments in Our Borough, he was aware that

listening or collecting data are not the same as acting on information received. Consulting and doing nothing with what one is told is *tokenistic*.

> *Well I think it's talking to people to be honest... because the form we were on about earlier [a questionnaire], it depends how you number crunch after you have asked questions and you can make things tell you anything you want, so what was the point, do you really want to be genuine and find out what's happening and I'm afraid it's all about getting your hands dirty, you've got to actually go out and talk to people. (Elected Member – Chair of Social Services)*

This is indicative of the response of elected members, who supported participation in theory, knew it was a government expectation, but were unclear about the practice of participation and what they should do with information, gleaned during the participation process. Young people looked after were seen as consumers of services who should be listened to in order to improve services, rather than to uphold their rights to participate in decisions.

6.4.3 Front-line workers' perspective

Front-line workers in Our Town were aware of general changes in the way social services dealt with young people that favour participation and these were viewed as part of the changing relationship that social services have with their service users.

> *There is far more transparency and accountability, it is a different way of working, the changes in organisation I suppose it's inevitable that that's led to it but there also has to be the will to go along with that, the people are not resistant to that kind of thinking. (Front-Line Worker 1)*

While they were aware of some of the initiatives that the managers had put in place (such as exit interviews and consultation groups) to facilitate participation, they were not clear how these fitted together in the overall structure of the organisation. They expressed positive sentiments about the department as a whole and there seemed to be a real buzz about the work they were doing. Front-line workers seemed to have faith that information

that they were providing to managers from young people was being used to help improve services, but they could not say how this information was passed through management levels, or how (if at all) it was used when it got there.

> *I would say that you are asking the person at the wrong level for that in a way, I take the information and feed that through but I do not know that people like [The Policy Officer] in policy actually do ...I would imagine that that's linking in with Quality Protects and looking at issues that come out of reviews ... I couldn't tell you what the process was. (Front-Line Worker 2)*

They were unable to say how the data they gathered about service delivery or young people's perceptions affected the decisions that were taken at management level. One front-line worker felt that the problems were associated with the relative youth of the authority and felt confident that when the systems had been in place longer an information feedback loop would be established. Overall, the front-line workers were clear about the activities they undertook in the development of youth outreach services and reviewing individual child care plans, and could report decisions they had taken that were influenced by contact with young people either in groups or individually. However, they did not have a clear idea how these fitted with wider departmental strategy to include the voice of young people in policy and planning. They were remote from policy making and did not know how policy officers, who worked in another part of the county, used the information they provided. Their belief that the department responded was based on their confidence in the organisation rather than on first hand knowledge of the way decisions were taken.

6.4.4   Young people's perspective

One young person was recruited as a research subject at short notice when the original candidate was unable to keep the appointment for interview and although he had spent many years in care in Our Town, he did not have any knowledge of the participation described by managers such as the consultation group or youth council initiatives.

The other young person interviewed had been involved in a recent meeting with the joint review panel which could have provided an opportunity for young people to directly influence social services provision, *assigned but informed* participation. However, her perception of the meeting indicates that it was on a more *tokenistic* level. She was not very forthcoming about her experiences and when asked what would happen to the information she had given at the meeting, she said:

> *I can't remember, I wasn't paying attention because I just wasn't interested in it really. (Young Person 2)*

Both young people recalled having completed questionnaires. Neither knew what happened to their responses nor had heard any results from the survey. Young Person 1 had responded to council questionnaires about services he had received.

> *The first [questionnaire] I thought I would ignore it and because I may have told [Care Worker] actually the same questions that they asked … so I just ignored the first one and then they sent me another one … so I thought I better fill it in before they start knocking on me door and saying "look fill it in". So I filled it in and posted it back and heard nothing since. (Young Person 1)*

Young Person 1, who had been in contact with the authority for approximately ten years, was positive about the services he had received and talked to staff regularly about them.

> *I thought it was just a natural question that people ask when they offer you a service. (Young Person 1)*

However, he went on to say

> *They are always asking our true feelings about the services and most of us try to change it but I don't think they listen, not taking it offensively, they do a lot for us young people but I don't think they listen. (Young Person 1)*

Young Person 2 discussed the visits that elected members made to the residential unit where she lived.

Q. How often do they [elected members] come round?

A. Not that often, I think you have to ring them first and ask them to come round before they come round.

Q. And when they come round, what sort of questions do they ask you about?

A. Nothing, they don't really ask us questions, they just sit and talk to us and watch telly with us and things like that and if you want to ask them something then just bring it up.

Q. And do people actually speak to them or do they just not talk to them very much?

A. Oh, no. They do talk to them and that.

Q. They are alright are they?

A. Yeah, sort of, no I don't like them.

Q. And do they make a note of what they say and say they will sort that out ...

A. Yeah, well they say they will sort it out and then they don't.

This exchange contrasts with the impression that Elected Member – Chair of Social Services (who visits residential units) gave of the process in his interview.

> *...we do rota visiting by members and it's at least once a month. Every children's home is visited by someone who doesn't work there ... We set out a training package for members as to how to inspect children's homes to sit down and talk to them, ask them what they think about the place, how they are getting on ... Every committee we have the rota visit paperwork and any comments that have been made by members ... is actioned. (Elected Member – Chair of Social Services)*

The perceptions of the visitors and visited were not the same.

Evidence from these stakeholder interviews indicates that the adult forums offered to young people, such as attendance at a joint review panel or council sub-committee, were not perceived as participatory by the young people involved and were *tokenistic*.   Other   initiatives   such   as

questionnaires were responsive rather than participatory and without feed-back young people can not assess the effect of their involvement.

6.4.5   Commentary on Our Town

In Our Town participation was management led, linked to established processes and procedures.   This forms the focus of the commentary. However, on completion of the stakeholder interviews, it was clear that only the managers had what could be called the 'big picture'.   As with Our Borough managers saw participation in strategic terms, they also knew its local history, and they had developed ideas about where it might lead. They saw helping to devise policy on areas that directly affect them as the role of the consultation group of young people.   A major objective in involvement was ownership of policy when it was implemented.

> *We are actually building the group, developing the group but also actually having a working party developing the policy and the end result hopefully will be a pro-active anti-theft, anti bullying policy for kids who are looked after that the young people own themselves, they have been involved in, they can monitor and see actually it working in practice to make things better. (Manager – Child Care)*

Our Town managers discussed issues in the style of a management briefing. They listed the various participatory modes they had initiated, but did not offer any reflections on the way they worked in practice. The senior of the two managers sat in on the stakeholder interview with her junior colleague and gave the impression she was supervising what was said. This may be a misinterpretation by the researcher, but she took care to make sure that no detail about the department's work was left out of the interview.   The general impression given in the interviews was that of a selling pitch for the department. This presentational style is in keeping with the management ethos of social work departments who now demand their employees show:

> *...agency loyalty, an ability to follow instructions, to complete procedures on time, to modify and placate client demand, to manage inadequate budgets and to work in such ways that will not expose the agency to public ridicule or exposure. This is the critical set of conditions which has heralded the onset of new*

managerialism in state social work

(Jones 1999 p.47).

The managers espoused a belief in participation as part of the management task, rather than as a conviction that sharing power was the best way of improving services. It was something expected of them and they wanted to achieve it because they were efficient managers. Our Town had not gone very far down the road of including their service users in the way they ran the department. Knowledge of the modes of work with young people was not widely disseminated and there was no evidence of a dialogue between the stakeholders. Participation was not associated with sharing power or including young people in setting the participatory agenda with the consequence that the people involved were going through the motions of participation without really understanding why they were doing it, or where it might lead them. This is clearly *tokenistic* and not a *partnership.*

One of the elected members who was also the Chair of the Social Services Committee had a good grasp of the strategies being used, but the other elected member and the front-line workers did not show the same depth of understanding.   All of them were positive about young people's participation as a general concept, but when pressed for details of the departmental strategy or the consequences it may have for the work they do, they seemed to be unable to move beyond describing their own experiences and hopes.

Even though stakeholders (other than managers) knew about participation in which they are directly involved, they did not engage with the ideas that underpin it. No stakeholders talked of children's rights to participate, or sharing power in decision making. Managers were the keepers of their own interpretation of the ideology of participation as a practice and quality issue, and this was not shared with the other stakeholders. The young people in particular knew little or nothing of the modes used and we have seen that one in particular showed indifference to being involved. Managers have *power to do*, *power over* and *power to achieve*. Their firm grasp on power

limits the ability of other stakeholders to shape participation or influence the way the department works. In Arnstein's terms adult stakeholders saw themselves as being involved in a partnership, but young people were at best *consulted* and at worst not even *informed* of the approaches taking place. Using Hart's model, the approaches were largely *tokenistic* because, although young people contributed to participation, the mechanisms to inform them had failed to reach the stakeholders interviewed.

Workers and young people were alienated from the process despite the sympathetic approach. There were mechanisms in place to give them the results of their involvement, which included a cascade system of information from the senior management group to all staff and regularly updated brochures for young people and while participation was seen as a force with potential for good by everyone, the positive vision of managers was not transferred to other stakeholders. This contrasted with Our Borough where all the stakeholders had some idea of the management's objectives and had some experience of participation.

The managers in Our Town were smartly dressed in business suits and presented themselves as enthusiastic and committed to producing the best services possible. They saw their organisation as a beacon of good practice and reported that it had generated interest from other local authorities. Their participatory modes, such as the young people's exit survey and consultation group had produced data that was in the process of being included in planning, but there was no evidence that this had produced services that were more effective or successful than if participation had not taken place. Nor was the process valued or even acknowledged by young participants.

The managers were confident, however, that the approaches they were using would deliver the best possible outcomes for service users. Their belief in rational systems to deliver the best results is explicable in terms of the managerialist approach developed in welfare services during the 1980s and 1990s (Sanderson 1992; Kerley 1994; Leach *et al*. 1994; Exworthy and Halford 1999). Pollit summed up the ideological interpretation of this

development. "Managerialism is a set of beliefs and practices, at the core of which burns the seldom tested assumption that better management will prove an effective solvent for a wide range of economic and social ills" (Pollit 1994 p.1).

Unlike Our Borough, Our Town showed no sign of adapting its approach as its experiences of participation grew. Where the Principal Manager in Our Borough understood the flaws in their original participatory strategy and had made changes to respond to service users, Our Town's confidence was based on theory and management systems. They had not reflected on their or the young people's experience and views. Indeed, they were oblivious to some of the problems that became evident in the research.

The managers in Our Town were eager to do well, confident that they had the right approach and produced rhetoric that was impressive, but there was little evidence that including young people's views in decision making or policy development was embedded in the culture of the organisation. Participation seemed to be a concept that was aspired to, but not one that was a reality to the people outside the management group. People nominated for interview on the basis that they had been involved in policy development did not know very much about it. This reflected a demonstrable gulf between the rhetoric of managers and the reality of participation for other stakeholders in this organisation.

Managers and elected members seemed to be concerned that the researcher should received the 'right message' about their participatory work and the high standards that they were achieving, but their impression management was undermined by the young people's ignorance of the process and the workers' perceptions they were not involved in policy making.

> *I'm struggling with making the link between practice and policy making really, I think that's quite difficult for me to actually make that link because policy is seen as over there isn't it and I'm much more practitioner based. (Front-Line Worker 1)*

The managers and elected members displayed a close and unquestioning relationship praising each others work and they did not speculate about other possible ways of organising participation or measures of its effectiveness. The authority was running the risk of failure by claiming high standards of participation, before they had secured their participatory strategies within organisational culture. Failure of managers to reflect created a sense of fragility and superficiality that was not overcome by the business suits they wore, strategic language used and brisk manner adopted. One front-line worker in particular questioned the masculine values that she felt pervaded the systems-based approach to delivery of services and promoted a feminised view of service delivery.

> *I think there would be more flexibility, I think there would be more creativity, I think there would be more impact emotionally for the kids, more around quality issues, silly little things like that can be dismissed because it's a bit womanly but actually they are really quite important for meeting kids basic needs. I think the women actually give more consideration to issues about self esteem and self confidence and that they have a more holistic view of meeting kids needs…they start from where the kid is and fit the service to that, where I think there is a tendency to …identify what services are needed and fit the kids into the services, I would say that the process should be the other way round. (Front-Line Worker 2)*

This expression of direct criticism of managers was unique in the stakeholder interviews in Our Town. While managers and elected members promoted their dynamicism and motivation, they had failed to convince their workers that the systems were the most effective way of addressing social need, and young people seemed unaware of the efforts taken to include them in policy making. The managers in Our Town had taken a strategic decision to develop participation as one of their management tools. They knew it was a government expectation and could be construed as part of service quality management theory. Managers had not thought through what the participation of young people might mean in terms of sharing power. They were very focused on the management task and had a controlling attitude towards its execution. While they gathered information from young people and gave them information in return about decisions that

had been taken, there was no sense of a dialogue, or the shifting of power developing in their relationship.

There was no evidence of an understanding that participation would need to offer young people the power to help set the agenda if they were to become empowered. Applying Hart's and Arnstein's models, the strategies in use were *non-participatory* and *tokenistic*. Young people were asked what they thought but had little choice about how they expressed their views. Participation was part of management rhetoric but did not seem a reality in the lives of all of the other stakeholders.

The managers of Our Town seemed to have a firm grip of *power over* and *power to achieve* and there was no evidence that other stakeholders apart from the chair of the social services committee were able to help determine policy. Young people in particular seemed unable to engage with policy in any meaningful way because they either knew nothing about it or were not interested in the modes of participation on offer.

6.5   Case Study: Our City

Our City took responsibility for all local government services in 1997 in the local government re-organisations that created the new unitary authorities.

At the time of the study the political composition was:

Labour	28 seats
Liberal Democrat	14 seats
Conservative	3 seats

The Social Services Committee was made up of:

Labour Members	7
Liberal Democrat Members	3
Conservative Members	1

Our City is described by the Municipal Year Book as a "leading city…[that] boasts a thriving business community, with major employers based in [the

area]. The commercial port has been a major force in the city's prosperity…"

Stakeholders described it as having

> *very varied levels of advantage, I think there are some quite affluent areas of the city… but there are two wards that are among the ten most deprived wards in the country… (Elected Member 1)*

> *a large city, it's an inner city, very mixed area, very multicultural…it covers lots of small communities (Front-Line Worker 1)*

Our City set itself high standards for participation by young people in all aspects of its work. Before reorganisation Our City was part of a large county council with a reputation for innovation and development in social work and the new unitary council has committed itself to listening and responding to the needs of all of its service users especially its young people. It has given an undertaking that all of its policies should take account of their needs and that young people who use social services will be viewed in the same terms as other citizens. The range of initiatives and apparent overall organisational commitment to participation was higher than either Our Borough or Our Town. Participation was a high profile activity.

At the time of the research Our City had launched a participatory strategy that aimed specifically to include young people in commenting on the department's policy making. They planned and instigated a group that was to comment directly on all aspects of the department's work. This group, known as 'Reality', was some time in preparation and had operated for several months at the time of the study. The stakeholders nominated for interview were either involved with this group or knew a great deal about it. In the other two case studies stakeholders were not necessarily actively involved in participation. Stakeholders in Our City therefore can be studied as a case within a case. The layout of this case study reflects this opportunity.

A steering group of professionals took the idea of 'Reality' forward and two workers were identified to support and facilitate the group. The project fitted with the wider vision that the city council was using to get closer to its citizens, especially its young citizens. The work of social services did not stand alone but, as corporate parent, was part of the wider city strategy that aimed to make services responsive to local needs and involve service users.

Stakeholders, especially front-line workers and one manager, were initially reluctant to give their perceptions about the way the department worked. However, as the interviews progressed, they were more forthcoming and were inclined to be critical of the department. Whilst elected members were positive, it did not take long for other stakeholders – managers, front-line workers and young people – to identify weaknesses in management structures and the department's approach to the participation of young people.

6.5.1   Managers' perspective

Against the background of Our City's commitment to involve young people in policy making, the department brought young people together to form 'Reality'. Managers used Quality Protects funds to pay 'Reality's' running costs such as transport and administration and the workers used group-work techniques to establish and support the group with an emphasis on self-direction. This type of support has been identified as important in successful user group development (Croft and Beresford 1993). The group produced a written statement of the things they had done in the short time they had been together. These included meeting various social work professionals and the Joint Review team, consultation on a complaints procedure and children's charter, National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) training for foster carers and renaming a placement breakdown meeting. They had also produced comments on six aspects of local authority service: communication, customer service, after-care, social workers, education and fostering. These were written up and distributed in the social services department. The group received local media attention and had contact with a journalist who took an

interest in what they were doing. Their photographs had been used in the public launch of policy documents and in internal departmental papers.

The 'Reality' group was described as:

> *...a forum for young people to be able to put their mark on policies and procedures within the department and look at actual practice and make some sort of impact. (Manager – Family Placement)*

The person identified as the originator of the proposal was a Service Manager

> *...who really believes in involving young people and bringing policy development to this level, so I think you know he's the permission giver (Manager – Family Placement)*

The young people in the group had been nominated by their social workers as people who were willing and suitable to be involved, but it had been difficult to recruit members. In Hart's terms, this project is classified as *tokenistic*. Young people were chosen by adults who then defined the activities that they were to undertake.

> *... one of the sad things is that it started as something that was going to be really good but trying to get people on board and get lots of people to support it initially and social workers to put names forward and see this as something positive, didn't come about and in the end it came to a group of us sitting there, pulling names out of a hat, almost saying well I know this kid and I know this kid, so that was a shame...(Manager – Family Placement)*

Of the two managers interviewed the one who was outside of the original steering committee expressed concerns about how the process of nomination affected the make-up and effectiveness of the 'Reality' group.

> *I don't believe three kids are representative of the views of nearly four hundred looked after young people in Our City, it's a good start, but you know that start has been as it is for a year now and it's not what it ought to be and every time we need to publicise the fact that we involve children in our planning and whatever, we wheel*

*out the photo of those three kids and that's exploitation
that's what that is. (Manager – Residential Services)*

She commented on other aspects of young people's participation in policy making

> *I think that it [participation] is still fairly new and I
> would have to say if I was honest, I still think it's fairly
> tokenistic really, the launch that was done of the policy
> recently, the sexual health policy which has just recently
> been launched in Our City, I think all the photographs
> that constituted the publicity had a young person in them
> but her part in that was actually creating the cover for a
> policy that had been created in isolation pretty much by
> the professionals… (Manager – Residential Services)*

When the information was about the sexual health policy was checked with the producers of the policy document (a voluntary organisation that worked in partnership with the social services department) the perception that it was tokenistic was contested by the sexual health worker who had been one of a group of professionals who had devised the policy. The researcher was told that young people had been involved with the development from the start. The realisation that there was a need for such a policy in the department had come from a letter from a young person to the director of social services asking for help with sexual health education and counselling for young people. This same young person was later involved in producing the artwork for the cover of the policy document and helped in the public launch of the policy. The sexual health worker outlined the political conflicts inside the department and the unwillingness of some front-line workers to accept a policy that they felt impinged on their way of working. These different perceptions cast light on the professional tensions inside the social work department of Our City but do not invalidate the manager's comments. Although contested within the department, the development of the sexual health policy is in line with Hart's definition of *tokenism* where children perform a symbolic function without their views making a difference to the process or decisions taken.

6.5.2   Elected members' perspective

Our City thought of itself as a participative organisation and the profile of elected members was higher in relation to young people's participation than in either Our Borough or Our Town.   One elected member's particular reason for the focus on young people's participation illustrates the difference.

> *While I was still a County Councillor I went to Paris in 1992, there was an international conference based around human rights and the UN Convention on the Right's of the Child ...Article12, listening to young people, ensuring they have got a voice in the planning of their services... I believe and to my way of thinking our input involving young people is based around that. (Elected Member 1)*

This stakeholder linked council services to the international convention well before Our City became a new unitary authority. The impetus to involve young people was a member priority before the requirements in Children's Services Plans was bolstered by the Quality Protects initiative. She also attached importance to government policy on social exclusion.

> *We have got many new pieces of legislation to cope with and we have got a government that at last is committed to fighting social exclusion and to implementing social change. (Elected Member 1)*

For her, involving young people was not only an issue of rights but a part of the cross-cutting progressive agenda then being developed by government. The other councillor was also in favour of the focus on young people in policy.

> *I really do feel that they [government] are trying to put children at the heart of government in quite subtle ways, in quite subtly re-distributive ways. (Elected Member 2)*

She was committed to young people's participation and advocated a sensitivity and awareness of subtleties in local implementation that mirrored those she detected in the government's approach.

> *... we have to realise that when social services often come into contact with a young person, they are often*

very damaged in varying degrees or have suffered abuse
and they need to be coaxed and you need to get their
trust. (Elected Member 2)

The elected members in Our City were positive about young people's participation in all aspects of Our City's policy making. They alone in the three case studies cited human rights, citizenship and service user rights to be involved. They supported the work that was going on inside social services but, as with Our Borough and Our Town, were not so clear on the details of what happened in practice. They knew about the 'Reality' group and other aspects of participation managers described to the researcher. One elected member did say that she did not always think that managers gave her credit to be able to deal with situations she met when she completed visits to residential units in her role as corporate parent.

> *I think that they [managers] are very protective towards*
> *us [elected members]. A manager told me .. "you must*
> *not worry terribly there are some children in this home*
> *who may seem quite aggressive, if they seem to be*
> *getting upset by your presence we may have to*
> *withdraw". We did get a chance to talk to one or two*
> *young people, there were just two of us with a manager*
> *and another young person came in showing signs of*
> *being a little bit restless and the manager decided that at*
> *that point that we ought to withdraw, so I got some*
> *information but not as much as I would have liked. I felt*
> *like saying to them, look, you have got to understand that*
> *I am not made of china ... (Elected Member)*

Just as they did in operating a nomination system for the young people's 'Reality' group, the managers sought to control the opportunity given to elected members by statute to find out directly what young people's experiences are. Using Levin's definitions, the elected members' *power to achieve* was being limited, as was their *power to do* by the control of the managers.

6.5.3   Front-line workers' perspective

The two front-line workers were employed in different parts of Our City but acted as the facilitators to the 'Reality' group. They arranged transport and organised a venue for 'Reality' to meet. It was a social worker who made

the connection between the funding that had just appeared with Quality Protects, and the city's corporate participative policies. The coincidence certainly gave impetus to local initiatives.

> *I think that Our City…they always had lots of, let's involve the citizens of the city in the city decision making, I think social services have come into Our City and then during this climate locally of user involvement and that is then being bolstered up and there is a great lot of momentum put behind it because then suddenly there is cash attached to it as well. (Front-Line Worker – Residential Unit)*

The 'Reality' group had been meeting for sixteen weeks at the time of this study and, we have seen, relied on three members to represent the views of 378 young people looked after by the authority. A worker, who had been involved on the steering committee and who was very enthusiastic about 'Reality', reflected on the difficulties of recruiting and retaining suitable group members, but not on the process of recruitment as such.

> *It was four and it's gone down to three, so that's a learning point in itself because we met about ten young people, and we had a commitment from five. (Front-Line Worker – Unit Leader)*

It did not occur to her that young people might want to recruit themselves or that there might be a place for the less articulate and less compliant. In spite of this and difficulties in finding members, the 'Reality' group had a high profile in the department and was supported at the highest levels.

> *I think there is a very clear commitment actually, the steering group is hugely motivated in gaining the views of the young people, very committed. (Front-Line Worker – Unit Leader)*

Although both front-line workers involved in running the group were enthusiastic about it, one of them expressed doubts about the way that a small group of young people was able to change some agency practice in a very short time. He compared this to his experience as a worker of many years standing who had not been able to influence the organisational practices to any extent.

> *... as workers we have sat back and thought, wouldn't it be amazing if we as workers had the power to change things that these young people have got and actually it's beyond belief in some respects that we could sit in staff meetings for year after year saying wouldn't it be great if this could change, they can say this little thing really bugs me and it changed, so I mean yeah it has been quite amazing to see but quite disempowering for us…(Front-Line Worker – Residential Unit)*

As well as making the same point about representativeness raised by the manager, the worker is also opening up the uncomfortable question of the relationship between professionals and users. The idea of partnership with service users being disempowering for workers has arisen in other contexts.

> *Marsh and Fisher worked with different service providers in social services departments to develop working practices based on partnership between workers and service users. While workers were committed in principal to the notion of partnership, Marsh and Fisher found that social workers in particular were concerned that enabling users to self define the problems that they wanted help with was 'de-skilling'. This was based on the view that social work expertise lay in defining problems for the user. Empowering users to take a more active part in the assessment process was perceived as disempowering workers*

> (Barnes 1997 p.139-140).

While Barnes' example is located in community care assessments of adults, the difficulties workers have in adjusting to the shifting of the balance of power to define and address problems in social services is similar. This difficulty may be exacerbated when the service users are young people who have traditionally been viewed as having less power than adults, and where they are subject to care orders.

Concern about representativeness and the apparent ease with which change was possible is indicative of the general perception that front-line workers are isolated from the policy process in Our City. As in Our Town the front-line workers felt isolated from the policy process.

> *There are briefings from meetings that are attended … there is supposed to be a kind of a cascade effect .. Very*

clearly we know that it doesn't work, so not only do our ideas that are here at the coal face get lost in terms of going up, similarly it doesn't come down very well either. (Front-Line Worker – Residential Unit)

The care taken by management to listen to staff became an indication of an alienating process, since being listened to was not the same as being heard.

...they [workers] give up trying to have an influence because they have not been listened to and they know its not going to have an impact, so what's the point in talking if its just hot air...The picture that I have in my head is as if you can imagine talking, I guess at a coffee bar or whatever and somebody sat there doodling, when you get a bit nearer you actually realise that they are not listening but if you are far away and you looked across and you go oh' yeah those two are having a chat, there is a dialogue going on between those two people but when you get a little bit nearer, there is one party looks as if they are listening, he sat in the right position he is making the right sort if grunts and nods at the right time but actually isn't listening and is actually writing their shopping list for Tesco's the following morning, that's the feeling the staff got. (Front-Line Worker – Residential Unit)

Front-line workers supported young people's participation in policy making, but felt alienated from the process themselves. While they were generally enthusiastic about the work of the 'Reality' group, their own experience of not being listened to by managers undermined their confidence that they (or the young people) would be able to exercise much power in big decisions taken about how the department is run. Front-line workers had no *power to do*, eroded *power over* as young people's voice was making more changes than their own, and no *power to achieve* because they were outside policy development. In Arnstein's terms, they were not even being consulted, just informed of management decisions. The realisation that they were in a *tokenistic* process led to the expressed unhappiness and perceived lack of power.

6.5.4   Young people's perspective

The 'Reality' group comprised three young people, but only two were available for stakeholder interviews. They opted to be seen together at one

of their regular meetings. Young Person 1 was very open and forthcoming with her responses, whilst Young Person 2 was reticent, sometimes merely nodding her head in assent of points made. The front-line workers who supported the group were with them before the interview started but withdrew to an adjoining room, although the door was left open. The young people gave the impression that they had a close relationship with the support workers, who provided food for the meeting, and chaperoned the young people at publicity events staged by the department. One of the young stakeholders gave one of the most positive, clear statements of purpose in involvement.

> *I think 'Reality' is about a bunch of young people getting together, putting their points of view across about how the system can be changed and improved and having their voice heard. (Young Person 1)*

Members of 'Reality' were invited to become involved with other departmental initiatives.

> *I think our most recent issue is probably our contribution to a new mentoring scheme for young people who are leaving care, and we have been invited to interview the mentors and to be the mentors. We have also highlighted problems that we all thought needed attention in all areas within the care system, education, health, social services, customer services. (Young Person 1)*

This involvement had the potential to give the young people a degree of participation in Hart's categorisation at a level of *adult initiated shared decisions* with children, which is one of the highest levels of participation cited in any stakeholder interview and, in Levin's terms, the *power to achieve,* whereby stakeholders can determine that a policy and/or a measure will incorporate at least some characteristics desired by the power holder. Ultimate *power over* the process, however, remained with managers.

> *the manager on the level will have met [the potential mentors] more than once and she will also be meeting them in the training programme ... and she will have a better idea of matching the right mentor with the right young person. (Young Person 1)*

The young people in the 'Reality' group enjoyed the chance to meet powerful members of the organisation. Positive views held by young people about 'Reality' were, however, tempered by caution about the department's motives for bringing the group together at the time they did. The young people were concerned that the issues they were addressing were not new, but had been important for many years. There was certainly distrust.

> *... so it can make the department look good but that's only because I feel very negative against them [the social services department] but it does make me wonder sometimes what with all the publicity, I think what is the reason now, because it's been needed for a long time. (Young Person 1)*

They questioned the timing of the group's formation, but did not appear to have made the links to wider council policies on participation or the expectations of Quality Protects.

> *What is Quality Protects generally about, can you remember what areas it was, was it about social workers, was it fostering, customer service, because we saw ... [the team manager] ... about the fostering, communication, who did we see about that, can you remember, was that Quality Protects? (Young Person 1)*

Both young people expressed suspicion that they were being exploited for the department's own ends. They were pulled in two directions, as they wanted the group to change the power balance inside social services and increase the influence of young service users, but were aware that the department may be manipulating them.

> *I don't think it's fair that they keep using our three faces, I am sure that there are other young people who would love to be in our shoes and aren't allowed to be. (Young Person 1)*

They were not sure what they were being offered but had suspicions about the reasons why they were being offered it. This lack of trust may be based on their experience of the department that had shown that it was not always dependable.

they [social services] are not very reliable, they tend to let you down a lot.

We are talked about without being listened to, that matters. Being told at a young age that you are going to be in care for a short time, when really the case is more serious and you are likely to be in care for a long time… there is not enough honesty from social workers. They don't tell you the truth if it is bad news. (Young Person 1)

They were also suspicious of the motives of politicians.

I really can't see politicians listening to the likes of us and remembering everything. (Young Person 1)

These comments illustrate a dichotomy in Our City's participation strategy. While on the one hand young people were invited to exercise more power than any other young stakeholders interviewed for this research, prior experiences led them to question the potential for participation to produce changes they wanted to see and, ultimately, 'Reality' disbanded having made little impact.

The high point of the young people's group experience was not linked to their work inside the department, but to the chance to meet other young people at regional meetings organised to set up the 'National Voice Project'. One 'Reality' member described this as the best day of her life.

It was absolutely amazing I have to admit I think it was one of the best days that I have ever had…it was absolutely brilliant, I mean that it was a long journey and everything but it was well worth it to hear other people's points of view because it made you realise that you are not the only one that's having a tough time leaving care, you're not the only one that's being neglected whilst you are going through the process of leaving care and there are loads of other people out there and some are in a lot worse situations. (Young Person 1)

The members of the 'Reality' group had major reservations about their work with the department. This contrasted with their involvement with other young people in the National Voice Project, about which they were

extremely positive. A lot of change was attributed to 'Reality' and the young people were held in high regard by powerful stakeholders in the department. Their perception was that 'Reality' had considerable power for change, giving young people *adult initiated, shared decision making* status, in other words a *partnership* in Arnstein's typology. These perceptions were not shared by members of 'Reality' who gauged these opportunities by their previous negative experience of the social service department. They saw the department's activities on a *tokenistic* level. 'Reality's' high profile did not overcome its members' low opinion of the department as a whole. Overall Our City's participative strategies were *tokenistic* in Hart's terms, with a touch of *decorative* and maybe even *manipulation*. This judgment is based on the small numbers involved. In Arnstein's terms it looks like *consultation* at best, and more like *manipulation*.

6.5.5 Commentary on Our City

The 'Reality' group was well known to all the stakeholders interviewed, most of whom had direct contact with it and could point to changes it had produced in social services policy (such as the re-naming of placement breakdown meetings and involving young people in NVQ training for foster carers). Nevertheless, front-line workers outside the group were concerned that 'Reality' was an initiative that was being given more credibility than it deserved.

The small numbers of young people in the 'Reality' group were not seen by the Manager – Residential Services as representative of looked after young people as a whole, especially of those disaffected with social services and who had broken off contact with them. She wondered if this approach was the best way of representing looked after young people. Workers discussed their desire to act as advocates for young people in policy making but their own exclusion from the policy process precluded such a role.

This study does not consider whether workers are more capable of expressing the views of young people than they are themselves, or whether more capable young people can express the views of those on the margins of

social services. It is clear, however, that the social service professionals in Our City believe both that they can advocate on behalf of young people and that only certain young people are capable of expressing their views. Workers wished to act as advocates, and managers and workers selected representatives only from those young people they judged capable of the task. They were not concerned with the relevance of the wider debate on competence (Wyness 2000), nor did they show any appreciation of inclusive strategies developed by other professional in youth work and community development (Fitzpatrick *et al*.1998).

From their divergent standpoints both the workers and young people interviewed in Our City welcomed any opportunity to participate in policy making. In both cases their past experiences of the social services department left a jaundiced view of the department's motives for participation, and doubt whether real changes could be made. These doubts were significant. Two months after the interviews the researcher was informed by the front-line workers who facilitated 'Reality' that the group was no longer operating.

> *At present 'Reality' is transforming. Some of our members are moving on to different things and we therefore have decided not to continue in their current form. (Letter from Front-Line Workers on behalf of the 'Reality' Group.)*

It is conceivable that the process of reflection that accompanies a research interview led the young people to a reassessment of participation in Our City and to a conclusion that the department had more to gain from it than they did. In any case the extent of involvement was minimal.

Managers and elected members in Our City had a bold vision for participation by young people in making policy for the provision of its services. Elected members advocated children's rights as the basis for their policies and wanted the work of social services to reflect these rights in practice. They understood that the young people needed to get together to share experiences and increase their self esteem and that practical support is important to successful participation. However when young people

discussed their reality of participation, problems appeared. Their scepticism of social services' motives means that they did not believe in the participation that had been set up by the department. They had been brought into the process after its form and purpose had been decided by the steering committee and nominated for membership by professionals, rather than themselves deciding to join. They were involved in a *tokenistic* strategy, with little or no *power to achieve*.

Young people did not trust or believe in the participation. They did not initiate or plan it, and it had little chance of being successfully sustained. More negative feelings were expressed about the way participation operated in Our City than in either of the other two case studies. No one in Our Borough and only one front-line worker in Our Town were explicitly critical of the approach used to include young people in policy making. In Our City, the workers, the young people and one manager referred to the work as *tokenistic* or being done to make social services look good. The expression of such direct criticism to an outsider sits uneasily in an authority that was making such claims for its participatory approach.

However, in terms of tangible policy outcomes Our City made real progress within a short time supported by the city's inclusive vision. Beyond the issue of tokenism, the problems of sustaining the 'Reality' group are an indication that Our City had not worked out a practical approach to participation. Enthusiasm and commitment at the top of an organisation do not obscure that the process was management and professionally controlled and elitist in its approach to young people. The young people who were themselves included sensed that even as the elect they were controlled.

The most positive aspect of the young people's involvement in the 'Reality' group was the chance to meet other young people at National Voice meetings who had similar experiences to their own. This chance to reflect on the situation of their peers and to place their own experience in perspective is an important element of service users' ability successfully to engage with service providers, as has been noted in research with adults (Croft and Beresford 1992; Barnes 1997, 1999). Without a wider view of

the position of other young people, representatives must rely on their own limited experience of the care system. Shared experiences validate personal perceptions and can lead to increased self-confidence and the development of a group consciousness. This has been an essential prerequisite for other disempowered groups who have challenged and changed welfare provision (mental health, disability etc). Isolated individual representatives sitting at the policy table with powerful and experienced managers or politicians have little chance of a partnership or *power to achieve* and change policy. Their involvement will not enhance the position of those they represent but can be used by mangers to legitimise decisions they have taken. Barnes (1999) refers to this as "playing the user card". Their presence in the process is then symbolic and tokenistic. Generally the 'Reality' group was denied access to their wider constituency.

How Our City reacts to the loss of the 'Reality' group will be a measure of their commitment to young people's participation. If they follow Our Borough's example and adapt and develop procedures in the light of their experience they may develop a shared organisational commitment to participation. If they retreat they will confirm the suspicions of the workers and the young people that the 'Reality' group was window dressing and that participation and partnership in policy making was not at the core of the department's way of working. Our Borough had some success because it carried stakeholders along and demonstrated long-term commitment.

The young people in Our City were being consulted about policy and the 'Reality' group had been given the chance to work out how it wanted to respond to departmental practice. Arnstein would classify this as a degree of tokenism, and an application of Hart's model indicates also indicates *tokenism*. The opportunities are not a partnership because there is no trust evident.

The centrality of children's rights to elected members' view would ensure that young people would be part of the participatory process unless political control of the authority changes. However, young people did not talk of their right to be involved in decision making in the stakeholder interviews.

Managers were trying to include them but did were not clear about what they were offering or why they were offering it.

Power over remains with management and elected members more by default than active strategy because no other stakeholder are secure enough to offer resistance to their plans. *Power to achieve* lies with elected members and managers because young people do not recognise their source of power in children's rights or trust the department's motives for wanting to involve them.

6.6   Commentary on the Three Case Studies

Our Borough began its attempts to involve young people at the start of the 1990s but found its preferred method, conferences, were *tokenistic*. By the time of this study they had arguably the most effective participation of the three cases. The Principal Officer's understanding of, and departmental familiarity with, how best to work with a diverse child care population led to the development of a range of approaches to engage with young people with all their varied life experiences. As the process developed young people's positive experience of participation meant that representatives began to work with managers to examine aspects of the department's policy and practice. The young people generally had confidence that their views would be respected and that it was worth investing in the process. The *power over* the young people that is vested in managers and elected members was shared with young people working in partnership to become *power to achieve.* This can be seen in the challenge to the Training Manager's perception of statutory reviews. The young people's involvement eventually influenced the retraining of other operational managers.

In Hart's terms, Our Borough operated as *adult-initiated, shared decisions* with children. The trust evidenced in the open and easy research contacts that were evident in the process places Our Borough's involvement activity at Arnstein's *partnership* degree of citizen power. Whilst we have seen that Hart does not have participatory relationships that are equivalent to citizen control in Arnstein's concepts, partnership in Arnstein's terms determines –

through its emphasis on trust – whether young people's participation properly falls into participation in Hart's sense.

Our Town aspired to the least ambitious participative programme of the three cases. Their approach was more consultative than participatory and reflected the managers' controlling style. Their intentions to involve young people were lost in their desire to run a dynamic and aspirational department. Their managerialist approach did not leave any space within the strategies and systems for other stakeholders to create their own approaches to participation and to incorporate them into their way of working. The department in Our Town was moving forward rapidly towards its management targets without pausing to reflect on the nature of participation or how young people might work as partners and become empowered as managers apparently hoped they would.

In Hart's terms, Our Town *consulted and informed* its young people. Managers would be surprised at such a verdict but there is clear evidence of failure to engage young people effectively. The articulation of participation as a management process is not the language of youth. Moreover, the extension of control, the use of *power over*, in the interviews demonstrates that the trust that is needed to produce *partnership* in Arnstein's terms and some degree of *participation* in Hart's was absent.

Our City's ambitions for participation were immense. The social services initiatives with young people were part of a corporate approach. Projects with apparently positive outcomes proliferated, yet the evidence suggests that in Hart's terms Our City was *tokenistic* with a suggestion that in its public relations use it was *decorative* and perhaps even *manipulation*. Against Arnstein's perhaps harsher criteria, Our City looks either like a poor attempt at *consultation* or, more obviously, like *manipulation.*

One manager and both front-line workers had misgivings about the 'Reality' group and its purposes. It was small; it had dwindled to three active members, and yet took on an impressive array of projects and, apparently, endorsed their outcomes. The young people themselves were sceptical. The

two out of the three active members who participated in this research project talked about their mistrust of the department. Given the pressure of expectation placed on such a small group, its collapse is not surprising.

6.7   Conclusions

A common feature in all the case studies was that none of the young people involved in participation, not even those in Our Borough, could give a clear account of the purpose of their involvement. There was no consistency in how and what managers and elected members thought involving young people could achieve. Where elected members were prominent, in Our City, the practice was poor. Where the practice of participation was best, in Our Borough, elected members took a back seat. It has been noted in other organisations that have experimented with participatory approaches that clarity of purpose and shared objectives are important to success.

> *...organisations and individuals need to be clear about why they are seeking participation, what they want it to achieve and what levels of participation is appropriate. These aims need to be agreed with participants and revisited at regular intervals so that the process can be evaluated*

> (McNeish 1999 p.199).

Even Our Borough had not reached this stage of activity in its partnership with young people. Mutual trust existed but the purpose was not commonly understood.

The unique feature that marks out Our Borough from the other two cases is that the practice of participation had developed beyond a strategic management objective to become normalised in organisational practice. Although managers can initiate participation and can change agency practice to make it an expectation, it is not until it becomes part of the daily experience of many of those who provide and receive services that it becomes a reality. How its success can be judged without a clear joint statement of purpose from which to shape management and professionals' activity and targets can ever be called successful is problematic. These are

not evident in the examples examined. Participation remains a more general aspiration than a clearly defined process with tangible results

Without efforts to reach out to workers and young people and include them at the very earliest stages of the change process, experience in the case studies suggests that partnership efforts are likely to fail. A theme running through the interviews is that what people believe about a process is as important as the activities they engage in. If goodwill and a shared vision exist, whatever types of forums or consultative strategies are used, they will be viewed positively. Management's motives and strategies will not be accepted at face value. Other stakeholders must either have trust based on past experience, or see evidence that convinces them to place trust in the future. Although all of the management groups wanted to include young people's voices in decision making, none of them was explicit on what ideological basis they wanted to work with young people. This lack of clarity is at the heart of the problem. When Croft and Beresford were writing about adult users of social services they noted:

> *We have identified two different, sometimes conflicting philosophies at the heart of user involvement; one service provider, the other service user led. If the primary aim of user involvement is to meet agency needs, people's response to it may be cautious. If it is part of a well worked out process to increase people's say and control over their lives and services, then its prospects are likely to be much more promising. All the evidence suggests that people's attitudes to involvement depend significantly on its nature and effectiveness*

(Croft and Beresford 1992 p.42).

Service users and front-line workers are wary of the latest management initiative that is supposed to change their lives for the better when they have been let down in the past. White (1994) concluded in her study of user involvement in the planning of services in social services departments that it is complex, time consuming, needs financing both directly and indirectly, but above all needs commitment and understanding. Despite this, it needs to begin somewhere. The aim should be that user involvement becomes part of the culture, not that it is an added on feature, an optional extra which can be

included or excluded as is convenient and expedient. If the underpinning philosophy is empowerment of the user, this requires movement on the part of all social services department workers to be successful: not just by the councillors, directors, senior officers and strategic planners.

Chapter 7: The Power to Shape Policy

7.1 Introduction

Evidence reviewed for this project indicates that young people have rights as citizens and that to varying degrees these are now being expressed in individual and group decision making in social services. The changes are similar to adult service development which is characterised by the move of local authorities towards viewing their service users as customers whilst still retaining democratic processes for decision making based on citizenship. Neither citizenship, which implies a group participation through the ballot box, nor consumerism, which is built upon individual choice, clearly dominates decision making and local authority departments are using both concepts in their participatory work when they involve service users in policy making.

As we have seen in the previous chapters the move towards greater participation may be regarded as a way to empower young people as citizens and as service users. Their participation is linked to their rights under the UNCRC, the Children Act 1989 reinforced by Quality Protects and their role as consumers of welfare services. Power to make policy decisions has traditionally rested with managers and elected members; increased participation implies that power is shifted from managers and elected members towards young people. A number of authorities have shown how young people are playing a more active part in social services planning (Willow 1997; Thomas and O'Kane 1999; Smith 2001). Questions arise, however, over whether these developments have given young people more power to shape the services they receive. The survey and stakeholder interviews both indicate that 'consumerism' was the most important factor behind managers' desire to include young people in decision making but that this was set in the context of an acknowledgement of specific rights for children. Respondents in the survey and other stakeholders such as young people, front-line workers and elected members, did not have a consistent understanding of, and many were not clear about how much importance should be attached to, citizenship or consumerist approaches. Neither did

they display a great deal of insight into the theoretical or legal reasons for young people's participation. Some stakeholders were well informed but these were only a small minority.

This chapter reviews the evidence gathered to assess how much power stakeholders have in the decision-making process. Stakeholders' positions in the policy process are identified, compared and contrasted in the context of power in local government bureaucracy, and conclusions are presented that offer an interpretation of the potential for each group to influence policy.

7.2   Organisational Description

Involving young people in policy making, as a manifestation of their rights accrued through a modified form of citizenship and the development of a consumer focus in service delivery, implies that the power to make decisions is being shared with them. Traditionally three groups have been equipped with power to shape the way that social services work locally: elected members, managers and front-line workers. Each exercised a different form of power, but each had the ability to make changes. Young people have now been invited to join these groups ostensibly to share the power to make and implement policy. This is a form of citizenship that is something that is availed of by users as well as permitted by social services. A short, reflective, description of each department chosen as a case study is presented, followed by an account of the source and nature of each stakeholder group's power in their particular local authority, as a precursor to an examination of their respective influence in decision making processes.

There are clearly defined differences in history, size, political complexion, and management culture between the case study areas. Their differences can be summarised in the following ways: continuity and maturity (Our Borough); new Labour/managerialist (Our Town); and lost ideal of newly emergent corporatist organisation (Our City).

These differences are expanded upon in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1 An illustration of the differences exhibited by case study sites.

	Our Town	Our City	Our Borough
History	Unitary authority from medium county. 3 borough councils merged into new authority	Unitary authority previously part of big county	Long established London borough
Political control	Labour with weak Conservative minority	Labour with weak Conservative minority	Liberal/ Labour with strong Conservative minority
Management style	Managerialist, top down, directive	Consensus building (failed), top down	Delegation of consensus

A series of perceptions and historical evidence is presented to accentuate the diversity of each case study site. Whilst working to similar ends within the same legislative framework, each was particular in its character and distinctive in operation. The researcher's perceptions are presented to highlight the differences in character and feel of each department.

7.2.1   Comparison of areas

Our Borough

Our Borough is a Liberal/Labour controlled authority with a strong Conservative minority. It displayed a delegation of consensus, with a range of stakeholders shaping responses rather than strong centralised control. Social work autonomy was presented as a professional response shaped by the liberal values of the Principal Officer who created and drove forward the vision that shaped participation. The informal dress code of staff and politicians mirrored the relaxed, approachable style of the organisation. Its involvement with Gerrison Lansdown of the UN monitoring group and

other organisations with a children's focus displays an outward looking corporate culture ready to respond to new ideas and reflect upon practice.

Our Town

Our Town is a Labour controlled authority. Our Town developed from a medium sized county social services structure. It displayed a top down, directive management style and was newly emerged from a management overhaul under the direction of a charismatic Assistant Director. Managers had a formal business-style dress code which gave the impression of a group who were primarily focussed on organisational management tasks. Managers and elected members were 'on message'; keen to present a united front with a clear message that focussed on the quality of service. They displayed New Labour values of rhetoric and control. The break from the old corporate structures gave them the freedom to define themselves in the manner of their own choosing. The chair of social services committee was part of the dynamic management group, an implementer, whilst the other member interviewed appeared subordinate although supportive.

Our City

This Labour controlled council displays a top down approach that appeals to consensus building, but which looks to have failed in respect of young people's participation. This corporatist approach was seriously undermined by the absence of the lead officer who had been a change agent. Corporate vision was politically driven with a strong rights focus. Our City was coming out of the shadow of a large county trying to shape its own political initiative and discard the history of its previously subordinate status in county affairs. Although a large city, it had not been the seat of county authority. In forging a new identity it was struggling to put in practice its ideological vision for participation but practical problems of delivery mean that there was no widespread belief in participation across all stakeholder groups. Uncertainly of management structure and embedding of change agents in consistent structural positions was proving corrosive to the belief that the organisation could deliver its vision.

7.2.2   Stakeholder groups in the policy process

Managers are salaried officers of the council. Working to a director who is appointed by elected members, they are responsible for the provision of services, and work within the legal framework produced by central government. Often their power is derived from what Weber (1972) terms 'legal authority'. They have legitimate power derived from their position in the hierarchy of the organisation. They have direct influence over how a department works by allocating budgets and by hiring and firing staff. In Levin's terms, they may exercise *power to do*, *power over* and *power to achieve*. Managers are technically skilled to work in their area of management. Working with elected members they decide on the priorities for their local areas and how needs will be met. This shaping of the agenda for change fits in with Lukes' *two dimensional view of power* (limiting decision making to acceptable issues) although they also have direct *power over* employees and on occasion over resources that determine what happens to service users. In a sense they also have influence on the decisions councillors make, as they provide them with the information used in formal committees where decisions about funding and policy are taken. Formally the most senior manager, the director of social services, is the council's primary adviser on social services policy and can exercise that responsibility through direct advice or by omission.

Current government thinking encourages a more 'joined up' approach to the delivery of services that are designed to address social problems, and the forging of partnerships between departments and between agencies. In childcare there is a move towards corporate parenting or viewing children and young people looked after as being a whole council responsibility, rather than solely the responsibility of social services. Social services departments should now be linked to other areas of welfare provision such as health or housing in efforts to provide strategic responses that can work across functional splits within local government and between agencies. This summary should not be taken to infer that all managers behave in the same way and are perceived as legitimate exercisers of power. As was noted in Chapter 2, as the sociology of childhood and youth has developed, it has

emphasised the diversity within social groupings. In the same way, social services managers are a disparate group with a polyphony of voices. Some will seek to legitimate their actions through bureaucracies but others will not. While I stress the power of managers (Weber) to shape agendas (Lukes) and refer to 'managerialism' as the legitimation of their role in contemporary welfare, I recognise that the study of organisations has developed beyond Weber's analysis and understand that each individual has agency and contingency to act in ways they see as appropriate. These differences were highlighted by the varied approaches to participation displayed by managers in the case studies (see Chapter 6).

Elected members determine the budget that each service is given. They lay down the broad parameters for departmental spending, but have to work within central government controls. This signifies *power to achieve b*ecause they are the final arbiters of local social services policy but do not have direct control of resources or even the overall level of resources. After the director of social services, the Department of Health is their main policy advisor within the regulatory structures now favoured by government (DoH 1999).

Their main power lies in holding the purse strings of social services but their personal and political ideas can influence the way that services are delivered. They are accountable to local communities via the ballot box and to central government by their duty to uphold legislation, more recently supplemented by the duty of Best Value (Filkin 1997). Elected members have recently been the focus of government reminders about their duties as corporate parents who are responsible for the safety and well being of young people looked after by the local authority. Thus young people become the direct responsibility of elected members who have a duty to find out how they are being cared for, and must keep themselves informed of their development and prevent their social exclusion (DoH 1998b). They are to be active corporate parents who do not just rely on information provided by managers. This implies that their increased knowledge will lead to an increase in their *power to do* as they will have the information and authority to influence decisions.

The recasting of the relationship between management and elected members means that elected members who carry overall responsibility for decisions taken and are now expected to know more about the way that the services they oversee affect the young people who receive them. Political control is being linked directly to the practice of welfare provision and the increased knowledge and expertise elected members possess in a cabinet system will mean that they should be able to challenge management practice more effectively than has been the case in the past.

The system of local government committees is being replaced by a cabinet system where a smaller number of councillors develop expertise in particular areas of service delivery which they then use to draw up policy in a cabinet setting. The ability to shape the debate through scrutiny and overview (Lukes' three dimensional view of power) without being involved in direct decision making means that the power of the community, via elected members, may temper managers' *power to do* and *power over*. Whilst the fieldwork preceded the implementation of these changes, they do indicate that elected members should be able to challenge what Weber views as the legitimate power of the managers in a bureaucracy. However, the effectiveness of this is dependent upon the levels of experience, political support, and knowledge of the issues that individual elected members bring to their role. The case studies demonstrated the diversity of experience elected members possessed and showed that a lack of first hand knowledge of the workings of the department gave some of them a confidence in participatory strategies that was misplaced (see Our City, Chapter 6).

Front-line workers who deliver social services generally have professional social work qualifications and fall into Lipsky's (1980) definition of 'street level bureaucrats' who occupy an ambivalent position between management and users, and operate a delegated form of authority. Whilst they have legitimised authority as employees in a bureaucracy (Weber) their decreased professional autonomy means that they have little or no *power to do*, diminishing *power over* and limited opportunity for *power to achieve*

(Levin). They deliver the services planned by managers and work within the policies set by government and the department that employs them.

In the past they had considerable devolved decision making powers and significant discretion, but as 'bureau-professionals' they did not have the autonomy of ancient or traditional professionals such as doctors or lawyers. Their power is based on the legislation they enforce and the knowledge and skills they posses give them influence. This influence is under considerable threat following changes in the way that social work services are perceived and delivered. Moves towards quantification and regulation have meant that their work is now increasingly proscribed and their duties are tightly specified and monitored. Tasks are becoming routinised and the scope to exercise professional judgement has been reduced as action is laid down by the organisation. Whilst the core values of the social work profession and knowledge of the theory and practice of social work informs the decisions they make, tight budgetary and policy controls limit their scope for discretion. While autonomy is being restricted, as individuals front-line workers can exercise personal agency that will reflect their own world view and impact on the relationship they have with service users. However, without the approval of managers and councillors, any new initiatives or practices they might wish to introduce are unlikely to succeed.

Their power is increasingly dependent on their relationships with service users, and can be classified as 'referent power' (Hellriegel *et al*. 1989). This is an individual's ability to influence others' behaviour as a result of being respected or admired. They are the primary point of contact with service users and they can influence the messages the organisation presents to the outside world and bring outside influences into the organisation. According to their style of working, they can empower or disempower service users, be autocratic or work in partnership, but the experiences of service users will be mitigated through them and they have the power to control that experience by the quality and manner of the relationships they make. An implication of young people's participation in policy making is that the direct experience of service delivery that was fed into the policy making process by front-line workers – often through professional or trade union

representation – can be replaced or supplemented by service user activity. Although working on behalf of service users, front-line workers' interests are not always the same as theirs.

Young people are being encouraged to work in partnership with other stakeholder groups to influence decisions. At an individual level they are involved in decisions about how their own cases are managed; collectively they are involved in planning and policy making. They have rights but no formal power within the organisation. There are three arguments for involving them in a process that potentially leads to some degree of empowerment: political, legal and social (Willow 1997). The political case for their participation acknowledges the benefits of involvement – services can be improved, representative democracy strengthened, and young people gain new opportunities, skills and insights. There is an assumption that representative democracy is strengthened by their collective involvement by either enhancing pluralism or devolving some decisions to a direct, not representative, process.

The legal case for their participation rests largely on the UNCRC and the Children Act 1989. The UNCRC has the status of international law and grants rights of participation, protection and provision of services. The Children Act 1989 makes it a responsibility of social workers to consult young people about their care. The social case stresses that young people are members of society and share the fundamental right to participate in decision making with other members of the community. This is a point constrained by adults' judgement on their competence to exercise agency.

The present government has been influenced by the arguments that children and young people should have rights of their own and its latest strategy for improving young people's social services, Quality Protects, stresses the importance of departments having mechanisms to listen to their views. Young people have not yet moved to the position of partners in service provision as other service user groups have done, but their position as consumers does give them a role in service provision. They can define needs for their group and advise on the most effective mechanisms for

service delivery. However, not all will share the same interests or want to get involved and their rights to self-determination as enshrined in the UNCRC mean that only those who want to will decide to work with service providers in policy making. Many will still choose not to engage with the organisation, especially on the terms that the organisation offers.

The nature of their power is harder to locate than the other groups. They are not formally part of the organisation (Weber), but the local authority as corporate parent has a responsibility to listen to their views and take them into account, that is, potential *power to achieve* (Levin). As service users they can also claim the right to take part in decision making via the UNCRC and the Children Act 1989. Participation alongside those who have traditionally held power can provide influence.

> The concept of decision making as power means that individuals or groups acquire power to the extent that they can affect some part of the decision making process. They might influence the goals being developed, premises being used in decision making ... alternatives being considered, outcomes being projected, and so on

(Hellriegel *et al*. 1992 p.542).

There is an expectation that their voice will be heard, but that does not mean they have to be physically present in the decision making process, nor that decisions taken reflect their desires. It seems that hearing a voice is not the same as doing what the voice tells you.

7.3   Interview Data

Theoretical explanations for the different power that stakeholders may be able to exercise have been discussed and these will now be used to interpret critically the stakeholder interview data. Stakeholders were asked general questions about their perceptions of the process and then a direct question about how much power they believe each stakeholder group has to shape policy. The answers to this question indicated that the majority of young people and managers felt that managers were the most powerful stakeholders, whilst front-line workers and elected members ranked elected

members as the most powerful. Young people and managers agreed that young people were the least powerful, with front-line workers and elected members perceived young people and front-line workers equally at the bottom of the power structure.

To get an indication of the relative power each group of stakeholders had to shape policy individual interviewees were asked to rank their group's and the other groups' ability to influence policy. Their responses ranked from most powerful (1st) to least powerful (4th) are set out in Table 7.2.

Table 7.2 Aggregated perceptions of the power to influence policy from all groups

	Young People	Front-Line Workers	Managers	Elected Members
1st	M	EM	M	EM
2nd	EM	M	EM/FLW	M/EM
3rd	FLW	FLW/YP	EM/FLW	FLW/M
4th	YP	FLW/YP	YP	FLW/YP

Note: Young People (YP), Front-Line Workers (FLW), Managers (M), and Elected Members (EM).

The perceptions of individual managers, elected members, front-line workers and young people were consistent. The rankings vary only by one place across the three case studies. Given the broad similarity in perceptions between stakeholders an overall ranking has some merit in summarising perceptions (Table 7.3).

Table 7.3 Stakeholders' overall perceptions of power

Managers/Elected Members	1st
Elected Members/Managers	2nd
Front-Line Workers	3rd
Young People	4th

Whilst managers and elected members vie for the most powerful position there is little doubt that young people are perceived as having the least influence on policy making. Every group, including young people themselves, places them in this position. Managers, on the other hand, perceive themselves as having the most power and they are so perceived by elected members. Young people and front-line workers, who do not have a day to day relationship with elected members, think that they have most influence over policy making.

These perceptual hierarchies are useful but tell us little about how power is used. We know where people think that it lies but not what kind of power is exercised or in what circumstances. The preceding discussion has provided a set of concepts with which power can be analysed and they are used here to understand what lies beneath the declared perceptions of stakeholders.

7.3.1 Managers

Managers are universally recognised as a powerful group in the policy-making process, not least by themselves. Young people, elected members and front-line workers all recognised the managers' ability to make changes and control the way a department works. The sources of their power from the stakeholder interviews are control of information and funding decisions, being able to frame the agenda for change and holding an overall vision of the department's structure and aims. They have: *power to do* – make independent decisions to initiate participation; *power over* – where they commit resources including staff time to the process; and *power to achieve* – producing policy documents that have included young people's

participation. They are also in a position to limit the power that young people have in participating in any of these ways.

Managers' legitimised authority in the organisation enables them to amass data about most aspects of the child care system. Also, they hold information about outside factors such as government policy or funding intentions via their professional bodies and direct contact from central government. They are the only group to know what all the pieces of the jigsaw are. Elected members rely on what they are told by officers to make decisions, and doubts were expressed by an elected member (Our City) in the stakeholder interviews that they were always given the complete picture. The elected member did not see bad or underhand motives for this, but she felt that officers might be trying to protect them from the harsh realities of departmental life. Another way of construing this aspect of management power is as the 'right to manage'. They are paid full time officers, mainly drawn from the social work profession, and it is their job to manage day to day activities. Elected members can hold them to account but would not be expected to manage (although the distinction will become less clear under New Labour's local government reforms) and cannot be expected to have the time to access a full range of information.

Control of funding

Although not solely responsible for major decisions about how much the department spends, managers were seen as the most influential in the ways that money was spent because they had *power to do*, the ability to make decisions (within budget parameters) for themselves. Their control of or access to financial information made them seem more powerful than elected members in money matters inside the department; all groups recognised this and saw funding decisions as critical to the way that a department functions. Croft and Beresford (1993) have noted that the funding of support for people who want to participate in service decision making is crucial to its success. The allocation of money makes a profound difference to the lives of young people and front-line workers and budgetary decisions were seen as tangible evidence that a department supported a participatory project or way of working.

Framing the agenda for change

In setting up participation to address service related issues rather than empowerment strategies for young people, managers exercise two dimensional power as defined by Lukes (1976). This can be seen as a way of making change without presenting a serious challenge to the status quo. As well as giving organisational permission for new ways of working, managers were the ones who decided where changes would take place and the limits or scope of development. Our Borough started out with this approach but developed to a position where managers felt able to open the debate to young people who could reflect on their own experiences and use their shared knowledge to inform the basis for debate, rather than focusing solely on aspects chosen by managers. A greater awareness of their position seemed to empower the young people to challenge agency practice on its reviewing system. This contrasts with Our Town where managers tightly controlled young people's participation in the development of behaviour policies. After considerable work young people produced a policy for use in residential care that set guidelines for their behaviour yet did not allow scope to challenge the basis on which a particular form of care (that may be a cause of the problem) had been provided.

Our Town and Our City never transcended the initial position where Managers are able to put young people's participation on the departmental agenda, and then frame the modes that would be used to bring it about. Participation was always construed in departmental terms and involvement took place around specifically departmental issues in both authorities. So, rather than young people meeting on their own to talk about their position and what they might want to do about it, they continued to be invited to join groups set up by managers. Young people were selected for membership on the basis of their abilities to fit in with these departmental structures, and support workers helped them frame their requests for change in ways that would fit with departmental norms.

Overall vision

Knowing the 'bigger picture' was an important part of controlling the organisation's work. Managers in all three studies knew more about the practice of participation, their intentions for it – that is, to improve service delivery – and how it may address expectations from central government than any other stakeholders. This unique position enabled managers to construct plans for the future and know where the other stakeholders would fit in to the process. Front-line workers and young people were generally aware of the need to operate inside departmental expectations and while they may dislike them, as did the young people and front-line workers in Our City, they did not seem prepared to challenge the status quo. Young people especially preferred to vote with their feet rather than confront the organisation. In Our City participation was perceived by young people and front-line workers as meeting the needs of the organisation rather than young people's needs, and was consequently considered tokenistic. The managers show more cohesion than any other group. While senior and middle managers may differ in their outlook, those charged with the tasks of planning, strategy and policy formulation work together to produce a picture of the department's response to the tasks it has to perform. Though they may disagree on an individual level, and the most senior members of the group may use an autocratic style of leadership, their ability to enforce a management view relies on collective action and a consistent approach (displayed in policy documents). They need to share common goals if they are to be able to explain and drive through their chosen course of action. Once a decision is taken, it is their job to ensure that this is reflected in the practice of the department and they could be said to have failed, if they do not exert control over day to day functions and cannot produce change when required. Their role gives them a common purpose and they need a common will to see that their vision is carried out. Only in Our Borough have these institutional barriers been breached.

7.3.2   Elected members

Elected members were generally seen as a powerful group alongside managers, having the *power to achieve* in relation to policymaking and

power over the allocation of the social services budget. Only front-line workers and young people perceived elected members as having the most power, however, they were not very clear about how exactly their power was exercised. They hold power at a corporate level but compared with managers they are not able to exert much influence on the day to day workings of a social services department. Even in relation to participation, despite government moves under Quality Protects expecting them to have a greater role in ensuring the safety and development of young people looked after (corporate parenting), their role remains limited.

Whilst all stakeholders saw elected members as important people, not all thought that they were well informed about the workings of the department or about young people's experience. While they made efforts to talk to young people during their statutory visits to residential units (Section 22 visits) neither they nor the young people felt that this gave them a very full picture of what was going on generally. For example, in Our City one elected member expressed her frustration that she was shielded from the realities of young people's experiences in residential care because during a visit with a manager an interview with young people was cut short when one young person became agitated. In Our Borough and Our Town, however, elected members made regular visits that they felt gave them an idea of young people's position and concerns. As one elected member said, "…it's all about getting your hands dirty, you've got to actually go out and talk to people" (Our Town). A young person in the same authority acknowledged that visits took place and that members talked to young people, but said about issues that they raised, "…they say they will sort it out and then they don't" (Our Town). Elected members were clear about their responsibilities as corporate parents; this is not surprising as interviews took place shortly after they had been written to by the Minister for Health reminding them of these responsibilities, but they relied on managers to carry out these responsibilities.

Elected members are powerful and they have status. It was generally agreed that managers are the real power behind the throne. Although there was talk of a developing partnership between members and managers, the only

evidence of this was in Our Town. In Our Borough and Our City elected members remained a distinct group with a different role to play; only managers had regular contact with them. Their power was channelled through managers who acted as a conduit for their influence in the department. Elected members have the potential to be catalysts for change, particularly in partnership with managers with separate contacts with young people. However, it is notable that elected members were not prominent in Our Borough, the authority that managed to move beyond a narrow managerialist perspective. Generally elected members did not challenge management agendas.

While elected members were aware of their responsibilities for what departments do, especially now that Corporate Parenting is becoming a reality, they did not seem to feel that they could directly control or shape what went on. They are powerful, but rely on officers and workers to effect change. They are optimistic that their decisions will make a difference, but when questioned they demonstrated little detailed knowledge about how it would be achieved. They exercise their power on a wide strategic level, rather than engaging in its direct application in the organisation. Elected members have *power to achieve* rather than *power to do* or day to day *power over*. In practice elected members have the status of people's representatives, but are divided by their political affiliations. They share membership of the same council chamber but the ability to direct local policy rests with the political group who have the most elected members. In two of the case studies the councillors who were interviewed were members of ruling Labour groups, but in the third a Liberal Democrat and Labour councillor from a hung council were spoken to. Six councillors (five Labour and one Liberal Democrat) were canvassed. It is dangerous to generalise from such a sample but it is notable that the one dissenting voice (who had doubts about participation) was not the Liberal Democrat. Elected members were generally seen as the most powerful group alongside managers, having the power to influence policy making and allocating the social services budget. However, front-line workers and young people were not very clear about how their power was exercised. Whilst they knew that elected members held power at a corporate level, they did not feel that they were

able to influence the day to day workings of participation. This situation may change as a result of central government expectations included in Quality Protects that regards elected members as corporate parents who are to have a greater role in ensuring the safety and development of young people looked after.

7.3.3   Front-line workers

Front-line workers were perceived by all groups as being relatively powerless in policy making. Their power in the policy making process was perceived as limited, sometimes at the same level or below that of young people, and their professional status was not valued in shaping the way departments do their work. Although positioned towards the end of the management supervision line, they did not feel that their insights into policy went beyond the middle managers since they did not generally receive feedback. Managers and members viewed them individually as functionaries (officials) who were to carry out organisational instructions and as a group who were stuck in their ways and reluctant to embrace change. Young people perceived that workers had little power to change policy (as opposed to everyday decisions where they can have *power over*) and saw access to managers and elected members as the way to achieve influence in policy making.

Workers spoke of policymaking as something that went on higher up in the organisation away from their level and said that they felt isolated from it. Of all the stakeholder groups interviewed they were the most marginalised. Stakeholder comments confirm evidence from the literature that describes the reduced autonomy of social workers. Front-line workers themselves did not know their place in their department's future (or its determination) and were wary about taking any initiative in case they strayed over the boundaries of their own authority. It seemed as if they thought that they should be involved in shaping things and were hurt and unsure why they had been left out, when service users were now being included. One worker in Our City, describing a user group he was facilitating, expressed frustration that a small number of young people had been able to effect changes in

months, when he had not been able to alter things in the many years he had worked in the department. This is an example of social services implementing government policy (to gather the views of young people) but at the same time marginalising other stakeholders in the process. Front-line workers' interests are subsumed into the greater need of the organisation and they find themselves at the lowest end of a Weberian bureaucracy struggling to adjust in a modern consumerist world.

The contact of front-line workers with service users, and their shared reality of a lowly position in the departmental hierarchy, tended to bind them into a group. Both groups felt powerless and, if anything, the front-line workers felt the deficiency more than the young people. Nevertheless, front-line workers are generally in favour of young people's participation in decision making because it fits in with their professional ethos. Their isolation from the policy making process meant that their collective will to change the system had no impact on the way their departments worked. This marginalisation was compounded by isolation from each other brought about by functional splits within departmental organisation. Workers in the same building might not all share knowledge of participatory initiatives, let alone a view on the modes used or outcomes. Even those workers most closely associated with participation expressed doubts about some aspects of young people's involvement on the basis that it was tokenistic. Social workers generally supported the idea of participation but did not share a view on the efficacy of the approaches employed, particularly the selection by managers of compliant young people to participate.

7.3.4   Young people

Young people nominated for interviews were not always aware that they were involved in the policy process. In Our Borough they did have experience of participation and expressed confidence that what they said would be listened to. Managers there acknowledged that while they were now good at listening they were not as good at responding to what they had heard. Young people in Our City had a clear focus on policy making but did not seem to believe that what they were doing was in their interest as much

as it served the department that was looking after them. They knew about the contributions they had made, but could not describe how these fitted in to the ways that the department worked.

All young people had been involved in a range of modes to collect their views. Some had responded to questionnaires or been interviewed, while others had been involved in meetings, but generally they were given little feedback about the results of their input and were consequently hazy about the effects they were having. Being invited to join the process and meet people they viewed as powerful raised their sense of self-esteem, but this was tinged with doubt about the security of their position near the source of influence. They did not demonstrate an understanding of the mechanics of the process they were involved in and this meant that their influence depended upon the support of adults who could withdraw this support at any time. They did not have an independent power base to work from.

Only one young person in Our Borough talked of a right to participate but did not mention the UNCRC or the Children Act 1989. None of the others referred to rights. It is possible they were so familiar with these that they did not think it worth mentioning, but it is interesting that they did not link their participation to rights and consumerism. There was no group consensus expressed about why they should be involved, but it was seen as a good idea as they knew most about the realities of their position. Young people felt that their experience was the basis for any influence they might be able to bring to bear, and their power seemed to be as expert witnesses on their own needs. They knew that their voice should make a difference, but were not sure how much effect it would have; they realised that people more powerful than themselves would be the ones who would take the decisions and were pleased to have been asked to contribute. In Our City, the young people had been positive initially about participation, but seemed to have changed their view when they reflected on their previous treatment by the department. They also questioned why so few young people were involved.

The approach of young people to issues tended to be reactive; they reacted to issues raised with them, rather than having any shared views that they

wanted to pursue. They did not delineate a vision for their future involvement nor did they know how the managers and elected members saw participation developing. Their enthusiasm for participation was not matched with the information to make change a reality. There was no evidence of a dialogue, even though information was passing from them into the management levels of the department.

In Lukes' terms the young people accepted the system that had been set up by managers or walked away from it rather than challenge the way things were done. In Levin's terms their lack of a shared vision of the rights they have to participate undermined any *power to do* and initiate modes of participation that suited them more than social service departments. They had no *power over* except the power to walk away from participation but in Our Borough and Our City there was an opportunity for them to exercise *power to achieve*. This was not effective because the young people did not seem to appreciate that their rights under the UNCRC and role as consumers of service gave them the means to make demands to participate.

Young people were the most disparate of the groups interviewed. They had little contact with each other and were the least well informed about the way policy is made in social services. There was no group consensus expressed as to why they should be involved. Their views were individualised, being based on their own experiences of the system. They recognised that they had status in policy making because their opinions were being canvassed, but did not attribute this to particular structural or legislative changes. They were being offered the chance to contribute but their lack of knowledge and experience left them without any clear strategy beyond trying to make things better for themselves and their peers. These observations suggest that they did not have a clear group will but there is nothing in their role as stakeholders who are effectively representing themselves in the policy process to suggest that they would have such cohesion. As demonstrated in Chapter 2, there should be no expectation that, even though young people looked after may be structurally defined in the same way, their individual concerns will be similar. This group will be as diverse as other socially

constructed groups in society and is therefore unlikely to have commonality of vision.

7.4 Conclusions

The high-ranking officers in departments are the most powerful stakeholders. Participation by other groups is a strategy that conforms to government and societal expectation of greater service user involvement, but managers' control over modes and participants maintains their own authority and the legitimisation of the organisation. Therefore participation in this setting is an adaptive, survival mechanism for the organisation and its officers rather than a mechanism for shifting power away from the centre.

Stakeholder groups are not class based or necessarily ideologically at odds, as discussed by Weber, but they do have different perspectives and interests according to their position in social service departments and in the policy process. Stakeholder groups' action in the policy process is distinguished by their status in the Weberian sense. In the case studies the managers have status because of their historical position at the top of the departmental hierarchy. They are aware of this position and their expertise, knowledge and group vision places them in a good position to impose their will. Elected members have status derived from the mandate of the electorate. Young people's rights as citizens and consumers give them potential power but their ignorance of their rights, or how they could use them to make changes, undermines their ability to pursue their aims in the face of opposition from other stakeholder groups. Their power is therefore latent. Their experience as a group of service users is a commodity currently valued by the powerful groups and they hope that the information they have will lead to changes. However their lack of a shared vision, cohesion, or agenda for change, means they have little hope of persuading the other groups to meet their demands if they are not already sympathetic to them. Their status relies on the opportunities they are given rather than rights or a mandate from their peers.

The ability to pursue a course of action or carry out the will of a group is a further aspect of Weber's definition of power. This research did not identify stakeholder groups sharing a will they would want to pursue, particularly in respect of participation. A group will implies a set of shared assumptions and some form of agreement about group goals. Some in the process (managers), but not all, display these commonalities; diversity of view is the main feature. Young people have little chance of setting the agenda for affecting the way that departments do their work and yet powerful others are keen to include them in the decisions they take. While each of the groups in social services may have different agendas to pursue, they do seem to share core values. They are all involved in the production or consumption of welfare and have a shared interest in corporate parenting and the support of young people. These elements of consensus are lost when power is exercised within a bureaucracy.

The young people were the stakeholder group least able to get to grips with the chances they were being offered to influence policy. One explanation for this could be that generally they, in common with young people in the general population, are turned off by formal decision making processes and political activity. According to the 16th Report of British Social Attitudes, "In all instances where it is possible to monitor change over time, teenagers and young adults have moved away from an interest in conventional politics" (Park 1999 p.37). The position of young people looked after among the socially excluded may also be a factor, because there is evidence in the report that teenagers who are most engaged in politics are those who come from better-off backgrounds, who intend to remain in education the longest, and whose parents are well educated and civic minded. The socially excluded are also the politically excluded. They may not therefore see any point in engaging with a process that is alien to their experience and does not present clear opportunities of improvement. They may also have little in common other than being labelled as 'looked after'.

Young people's engagement and the willingness to help managers with their participatory strategies is resonant with Gramscian hegemonic conformity. Even though they were not able to point to significant changes that their

involvement had produced, or that it was likely to produce in the future, they seemed willing to keep trying. Their own experiences showed them that the present system needed improvement but they were not convinced that their involvement in policymaking would really lead to change. They were trapped in a situation that they found unsatisfactory, but that they did not know how to challenge effectively. Young people say they want changes, but do not have any faith that they will be able to assume the power to change. It is as if they are going through the motions, without having the conviction or the strategy to challenge the way things are.

Prior to the Children Act 1989, the ratification of the UNCRC and the implementation of Quality Protects, social service managers had little guidance on the inclusion of young people in decision making. They would have been aware of the inclusion of adult service users following the implementation of the Community Care Act 1990 and the influence of the new social movements, but it was left to them to decide how young service users might be involved and the extent of their influence. The UNCRC was available to guide their practice. At least one local authority appointed a children's rights officer as early as 1985, but generally action was not institutionally instigated. It was left to voluntary organisations and specialist practitioners inside social services – for example children's rights officers and advocates – to raise the profile of rights-based work in child care social work. Once central government expectations changed, managers and councillors sought to modify their relationships with young people. Under the Conservative administrations of the 1980s clients became individually empowered consumers while the new social movements helped to radicalise service users using the techniques developed in the civil rights struggle in the USA. Politicising around identity proved a pivot for theorising and developing models that challenged the view of powerful professionals. Powerless clients became empowered customers or radicalised service users. The changes in legislation and politics apparently demanded a reconfiguring of the means of control and new voices were present at the negotiating table.

New legislation and consumerist approaches challenged local hegemony by allowing other voices legitimate access to the policy making process. These new voices challenged the old order and conflict with service users was added to the traditional struggles that had emerged between officers/managers and elected members (Day and Klein 1987). We can understand how managers have tried to exert control and maintain stability within an increasingly fractured bureaucracy in terms of Lukes' *'Three Dimensional View of Power'*. This is a development of hegemony and is the ability to define the agenda and shape preferences to prevent conflict arising in the first place. Its formulation is close to what has been observed in practice as young people have accepted the constraints on action and scope for change. Lukes incorporated the research of Crenson on local political practice into his model:

> *Local political forms and practices may even inhibit citizens' ability to transform some diffuse discontent into an explicit demand. In short, there is something like an inarticulate ideology in political institutions, even in those that appear to be most open-minded, flexible and disjointed –- an ideology in the sense that it promotes the selective perception and articulation of social problems and conflicts…[and] local political institutions and political leaders may… exercise considerable control over what people choose to care about and how forcefully they articulate their cares*

 (Lukes 1976 p.45).

Here we see the ability to shape policy making in the present case through the predominance of managers' values. The language and structures of policy are adult and bureaucratic and their use favours those who have experience and skills in bureaucracies. There was little evidence of any open conflicts between the groups (except for the collapse of the 'Reality' group in Our City) and there was an acceptance, albeit grudging in some cases, that what is on offer is the way that things should be done. Rather than challenge the system using direct action and media campaigns associated with new social movements, those young people in personal contact with elected members and managers mastered a new language and way of working and became apprentice bureaucrats rather than an independent force in their own right, their conformity lessening any opportunity for

challenging the status quo. De Montigny (1998), who observed young people's participation in decision making with managers in child welfare services in Canada, noted that young people unwittingly confined themselves to the inner logic and structure of the agency whose policy and decision making they sought to oppose.

Young people who are looked after are in an ambivalent position. By the government's social indicators they are an important part of the socially excluded, but even though they realise that they have been getting a poor deal from their corporate parents, they do have a collective will or a strategy to pursue change. Operating as individual consumers with rights they may make a difference in individual cases but it is not yet clear if this will lead to improvements in the circumstances of the group.

The political theorist Paulo Freire (1972) was interested in the individuality of oppression, and developed his concept of critical pedagogy as a way of empowering oppressed people in Brazil. His vision of the poor as the children of the dammed, the wretched of the earth, the victims of a culture of silence, has a resonance with the situation of young people looked after. Young people's inability to challenge the powerful even when they are clearly harming them shows a similar use or abuse of power in a social work setting. Freire's strategy of using critical education as a means of challenging oppression, by posing questions that point to alternative perspectives and possibilities, offers a way forward to those groups who seek to end the poor treatment of young people looked after by the state. However, such an approach is a long way from the management strategy in Quality Protects that imposes systems to improve service quality and sets targets and monitors outputs. This contrasts with a strategy that seeks to empower individuals or groups to challenge structures.

A strategy of critical pedagogy is not without its own dangers. While departments that deliver welfare services are organised on bureaucratic lines inside the local state, managers will try to retain the ability to set the agenda for debate and act in ways that Lukes identified. Constituting young people as a group with rights to influence and shape service policy may provoke

defensive action from managers who would remain responsible for delivering services they no longer controlled as they had in the past. Young people could be seen to be exercising rights to help design services without carrying the responsibility for the consequences that could flow from their decisions.

All stakeholders perceived the traditional power brokers in policy making, managers and elected members, as the most powerful actors in the process. The managers as a group exercise the most power in the cases studied; they are the ones that can make things happen and their influence effects all of the other groups involved. They are well placed at the centre of the process of policy making. Information given by others passes to them; they then control what is passed out to the other groups. Such control over the shape and content of the discourse with other actors in the policy making process makes them powerful in Foucault's analysis of micro politics. Managers create the reality of internal policy making to which the other actors respond. Their centrality and strong hold over information means that they can shape the discourse that is the vehicle for the exercise of power. The shaping of the structures in which the discourse takes place also defines the terms of engagement for others and determines their scope to direct change.

When elected members were asked about their knowledge of the practice of young people's participation they knew less about the history and the reasons or the results of participation than the managers. Accountability, to them, made them symbolically powerful but managers' control of information and participation as strategy gave them more power in the process. Managers could initiate participation and decide its form (*power to do* and *power over*), they decided on the areas to be addressed which tended to be organisational rather than fundamental (Lukes' three dimensional view) and their legitimated status in the organisation (Weber) gave them control over front-line workers. They were the group that produced the final policy product. Elected members' information deficit meant that they assumed things were done but could not be sure that they were. This limited their *power to do* and *power over*. Any *power to achieve* lay in their support of participation in a general sense and the final say before policy was

ratified. A semi-detached role of members may well be challenged when corporate parenting becomes more deeply embedded into the organisational culture and they become familiar with the new executive function (DETR 1998). Their legitimate authority is their ability to decide on spending and which policies are pursued. Elected members are also involved in creating frameworks for action, but they operate at a more ideological level, using political ideology or personal experience as their frame of reference. They do not have the technical competence of managers to operate within the bureaucratic structure of social service departments. Even if they have general knowledge based on previous experience of working in local government their reliance on officers for up to date operational data places them at a disadvantage if they want to institute change against the wishes of managers.

Front-line workers seem to be almost totally excluded from the policy making loop and they and all the other groups seem to know this. Their lack of power in bureaucracies is not unexpected if Lipsky's observations hold true in present day social work, but the knowledge that they feel they have something to contribute but are not able to do so makes their position even more uncomfortable. As workers, their exclusion from the dialogue is disempowering. Recent developments that routinise the social work task are likely to increase this sense of isolation from policy making and make managers more powerful (Clarke *et al*. 1994).

Young people have entered the discourse without knowing why they are there or where their potential power to make change comes from. It is not clear from the interviews that they would want to instigate change even if they knew they had the power to do so. They are hampered by their narrow view and the organisational experience to use rights and structures to the best effect. They do share a common identity as childcare service users, but the stigma associated with this label works against using this as an identity upon which to build a political response such as was used by the civil rights, disability or survivors of mental health services movements.

Chapter 8: Recommendations and Conclusions

8.1 Introduction

This study investigated young people's participation in the policy processes of social services. Its focus is organisational as it explored the theoretical basis for their involvement and tested the realities of this involvement by listening to what stakeholders had to say about it. This chapter summarises the findings of the study and provides recommendations that clarify young people's role in the policy process and, if followed, strengthen their influence in policy decisions which shape the services that they depend on. The chapter opens by contrasting the empirical findings gathered in the survey and stakeholder interviews with the theoretical basis for participation. Recommendations for government level action are presented, based on these findings. These are followed by recommendations for enhancing young people's participation contextualised by observations on the practice of participation in a social services organisational context.

This study has shown that children and young people are citizens who have rights. They have the competence to comment on, and influence, their environments and this rights-based discourse is an effective way for them to exercise their citizenship. Social services departments are working with young people to inform their policy decisions but are confused about the basis upon which young people are involved. A consumer or quality focus is the predominant reason given by stakeholders for involvement. This approach is a service led strategy and against the criteria developed by Arnstein (1969) and Hart (1997) it produces tokenistic involvement. It disempowers young people, leaving them unclear about their rights to participate, confining them to adult agendas and structures, and denies them status in the policy process.

To redress the balance of power presently weighed in favour of service providers it is proposed that policy development should take place on the basis that young people are citizens with rights to participate. This redefines the practice of participation by making it clear why they are involved and

defining them as stakeholders whose views are to be respected and acted upon. Citizenship also gives them the choice about whether they are to be involved and on what terms.

8.2 Participation in Practice: Recommendations Arising from the Study

8.2.1 Disparity between the theory and practice of participation

The three case studies explored the perceptions of stakeholders and showed that there is diversity and difference in the history, current practice and proposed future shape of participation. Departments differed in what they were doing and how they were doing it, stakeholder groups within departments differed in their perceptions and goals for participation and perceptions differed within stakeholder groups. These differences were not addressed in the policy process and, as the survey demonstrated, while adults felt that participation was a good idea there was little or no consensus about the specific benefits for children and young people, organisations and their practice, or young people's ability to exercise citizenship rights. When young people and front-line workers reflected on this lack of consensus and clarity in the processes in which they were involved, the positive feelings they held about the work they were doing were replaced by the realisation that efforts, whilst worthy in intent, did not produce changes that clearly benefited young people looked after for whom services were being provided.

In contrast to these empirical findings, we have seen that children and young people are recognised by social scientists as independent actors who have the competence and legal and moral rights to participate in decisions about all aspects of their lives (Lansdown 1995; Flekkoy and Kaufman 1997; Willow 1997; James *et al.* 1998; Wyness 2000). Globally, the UNCRC and the continued work of the Committee for Children's Rights have produced a framework for states that defines what their relationship should be with their young citizens. In recent reports, produced for the Conference on the Implementation of the UNCRC (2001), the Committee acknowledges progress that has been made but points to the work that still needs to be

done to change adult concerns for children from their current expression in terms of welfare, to an acknowledgement of children's human rights. Changing adults' attitudes towards children is 'work in progress' and many states still have a long way to go before children's participation becomes a reality in individual and group decision-making.

8.2.2   Legislative and policy changes

Although legislation and practice guidance such as the Children Act 1989, Quality Protects, Best Value and Children's Service Plans all stress involvement, because the UNCRC does not have the status of law in England and Wales there is no clear legal framework that upholds children's rights. It is therefore recommended that:

The United Kingdom should incorporate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into law to ensure children's civil, political, cultural, economic and social rights.

This would change their right to participate from a privilege bestowed by enlightened adults to an entitlement as equal members of society. It would also clarify their role in policymaking and establish a clear theoretical framework for the process. To enforce this change in legislation and to provide an independent view of its implementation, it is recommended that:

An independent Commissioner for Children's Rights in England should be established with the aim of influencing policy and practice, advising government and public authorities, conducting enquiries and monitoring progress.

Making the UNCRC a statutory requirement and appointing an independent Commissioner for Children's Rights are proposals that are relevant to all young people, not just those looked after. Awareness of rights and how they can to empower children in decision making should be developed in practice through the citizenship education that is included in the National Curriculum (DfEE 1999). Therefore:

All children should be conversant with their rights to participate and provided with opportunities to develop participation skills in their everyday lives.

8.2.3   Clarifying the context of participation

The survey of social services departments and the managers' stakeholder interviews identified consumerism and service quality as the principal factors driving young people's participation in social services policy making. This study shows that consumerism is not an effective basis for participation because young people have no choice of service provider when looked after nor any real chance to exit services that are unsatisfactory. Such an approach, while fulfilling management targets of service delivery, is not an effective empowering strategy for young service users. Cooke (1992) showed that social service users are not the same as consumers of other goods and services. A consumer focus implies a service led approach that in turn defines the parameters of participation in adult terms. A clear rights focus offers young people the best opportunity to influence decisions that affect them. All stakeholders need to be aware that it is upon this basis that young people are involved (Treseder 1997; Baldry and Kemmis 1998). To address this it is recommended that:

Adult stakeholders – front-line workers, managers and elected members – should be given training in the principles and practice of a rights based approach to welfare provision that has a clear focus on participation. This should be included in professional social work training and training for elected members in corporate parenthood.

The Department of Health should establish requirements for directors of social services and elected members to uphold the UNCRC in social services departments. This should be monitored through arrangements already in place under the Quality Protects Framework and regular Joint Review Inspections conducted by the Audit Commission and Social Services Inspectorate.

Nationally, non-governmental organisations, including the major children's charities (The Children's Society and The National Children's Bureau), academics and practitioners (including children's rights officers and social workers) are using human rights to change policy and practice in order to reflect an increased awareness of young people's role as citizens. Moves to reduce young people's social exclusion and marginalisation from mainstream society are supported by government policy. Participation underpins regeneration strategies and empowerment in political life via youth councils and shadow parliaments (Treseder 1997; Matthews 2001). In education, through the use of school councils and the inclusion of citizenship in the National Curriculum (DFEE 1999), government policy gives a clear indication of the state's intention that the involvement of young people, to establish their needs and views, should be an underlying principle informing service provision. Similar political will is evident in social work, through the Children Act 1989 and the recent development of Quality Protects.

Recent research (Schofield and Thoburn 1996; Hayden *et al*. 1999) acknowledges the changes that adherence to such principles will make to the practice of welfare. They challenge the welfare approach to young people in need and argue that replacing it with an empowering strategy that informs young people of their rights and supports them in their legitimate desires for a good quality of life and autonomy is the most effective way of offering them protection. Whilst there remains an unresolved tension between the welfare position and the upholding of human rights in social service departments, recent legal developments in Scotland that will outlaw physical punishment for young children based on their human rights indicate a growing acceptance of rights as the basis for intervention. These have yet to be matched by increasing influence in the provision of services. It is recommended that:

The government clarifies its position on young people's rights to protection and participation and ensures that protection in the guise of welfare does not undermine their right to participate.

8.2.4   Participation by young people looked after

While the UNCRC and appointing a Children's Commissioner concern the rights of all young people, those looked after require specific information and skills. They need the opportunity to develop the practice of participation inside the organisations they depend on. Research by Biehal *et al*. (1995), Willow (1996), Grimshaw and Sinclair (1997), Thomas and O'Kane (1999) and Hill (2001) shows that young people looked after need to know what their rights are and be given opportunities to practice citizenship in order to develop the skills needed for successful transitions to independence and adulthood and also help shape organisations that are charged with their care and protection. Participation should be engaged in by all young people who wish to be involved, rather than (as was the case in Our City and Our Town) only by those who are articulate or deemed 'suitable' by adults. Adult selection excludes the voice of the disaffected who have the right to articulate their views of the services they receive. Indeed, without their participation, policy makers are denied the very knowledge that can improve services for all. Inclusive methods developed in youth work and urban redevelopment has proved effective in reaching out to the marginalised (Hurley and Duxbury 2000). Recommendations to widen participation are:

That young people should be supported by appropriately trained adults to share their experiences of their looked after status, identify areas for change and formulate a strategy to pursue these. This can be accomplished by widening participation of young people in the National Voice Project and other projects of this sort, both inside and outside social services.

That participation should be widened inside the organisation so that more stakeholders have experience of participating by moving away from exclusive reliance on small consultative groups.

That priority should be given to involving young people not currently involved in policy formulation – those in foster care, those placed outside

the local authority, those in residential special schools, black and minority ethnic young people and young people with disabilities.

8.2.5   Support and participation

Young people need support and advocacy to help them engage successfully with participation (Treseder 1997; Laws 1998). Their basic needs should be met to give them the physical well being that is required as a prerequisite to engaging with organisations and challenging to change practice. Those adults who work with young people should have insight into their own attitudes towards children's competence and be ready to work with them as partners and, while not always agreeing with them, respect the views they present.   Hill (2001) found that organisations which engender a listening culture and can engage positively with all their stakeholders are most likely to be able to offer constructive participatory experiences. The present study shows that general mission statements such as 'aspiring to be a listening authority' (Our Town) or a desire to include all service users in policy making (Our City) fail to give young people influence because they do not have a clear focus or measurable outcomes. A strategy that upholds rights can be more easily tested to see if stakeholders believe their rights have been upheld. It also offers redress if services fail to support the UNCRC.

The survey showed that even prior to the implementation of Quality Protects, most social services departments wanted to include young people in their wider decision-making processes.   However, there was confusion about why they wanted to do this and departments demonstrated large differences in the modes they used. While some departments did seem to have got to grips with defining why they wanted to work with young people and what this could achieve for stakeholders, generally positive rhetoric was counterbalanced by unfocussed practice. To implement government policy at departmental level and clarify the basis of participation it is recommended that:

Social services departments should have in place policy statements that clearly express their aim to uphold the UNCRC, and objectives that

demonstrate how this is to be achieved. It is the responsibility of all adult stakeholders to uphold and facilitate young people's rights to participate.

The fieldwork for this research pre-dated the implementation of Quality Protects. At that time, departments were actively looking for practical guidance to avoid participation becoming tokenistic and short-lived. These issues have subsequently been addressed by practice guidance produced to help practitioners find the balance between creating processes that engage young people and those that offer valid and reliable information for service providers. It is recommended that:

Social services practice should be informed by independent guidance devised and produced by The Children's Rights Officers and Advocates Association (CROA) and non-governmental organisations such as the National Children's Bureau.

A sample copy of guidance is produced in Appendix 8.

8.2.6   Stakeholder investment in participation

In Chapter 6 we found that young people and front-line workers in Our Town and Our City had poor experiences of being involved within the organisation because their social service departments had not acted upon what they had been told. This resulted in a loss of commitment to the service-led participation offered by departments. These negative experiences then undermined their commitment to the idea of participation. By contrast in Our Borough, where trust and a developing partnership were observed, stakeholder perceptions remained positive. It is contended that the experience stakeholders have gained in the practice of involving young people in policy making is a significant factor in the way it is viewed in the department. Our Town had not been able to make participation part of their organisational culture and knowledge and understanding of policy making in general was not evenly shared across stakeholder groups. Our City placed considerable emphasis on participation, but stakeholders did not have sufficient positive experience of the process to overcome their reservations

about its effectiveness. It was Our Borough's open and reflective style of management that utilised personal contact and local initiatives that produced positive responses from young people and front-line workers. The relationships between stakeholders are important factors in successful participation. It is recommended that:

Departmental decision making should operate within a strategic framework that upholds children's rights but that decision making should be devolved to local levels to make positive personal experiences possible, and to establish policy that reflects diverse needs and particularly those of sub-groups of service users (e.g. black or disabled young people, or young asylum seekers).

The study found that young people and front-line workers in Our Town and Our City were not clear about the impact their views were having on the policy process. A general feature of the interviews was that none of the young people involved in participation gave a clear account of the purpose of their involvement; one talked of a right to be involved but none named the UNCRC as the basis for their involvement. Other stakeholder groups were not specific as to what they hoped participation would achieve, or how it would achieve it. The lack of clarity in stakeholder perceptions and the absence of negotiations with young people at the start of the process hindered the creation of a shared vision of participation or what it could achieve. Therefore recommendations to improve the process are:

That the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders should be clearly drawn.

That once the participatory focus is decided upon, clear aims and objectives should be established so that the effects of participation can be measured and evaluated. Stakeholders should be clear about any limitations to participation, for example statutory obligations.

That those participating sh ould be realistic about the extent and possibility of change.

That social service departments should be accountable to all stakeholders by reporting back the outcomes of their participation.

That what is heard should be acted upon or an explanation given as to why action is not possible.

8.2.7   Power and participation

Social services departments are adult dominated structures that are themselves controlled by powerful adults. Managers' power to define the agenda and the process of participation means that decision making remains with them. Even where they collect the views of young people, they are not obliged to take them into account or to incorporate them into policy. They are accountable to central government and elected members but not directly accountable to young people who use the services they provide (Wyness 2000). Even when powerful adults (managers and elected members) wish to involve young people, the structures and modes they use, combined with the absence of a rights centred approach, undermines their stated intention. Coles (2000) reviews a range of forms of participation in youth policy and practice and notes that adult dominated formal meetings and formal, democratic means of involving young people marginalise the young socially excluded. He contrasts the low level of interest young people have in externally developed politics and policy making with their enthusiasm and intelligent and constructive contributions in shaping services with their own and other young people's welfare in mind. The present study has shown that the will for participation exists amongst all stakeholder groups but that this desire is thwarted because there is no common framework (children's rights), no understanding of what is needed for successful participation (practice guidance) and insufficient trust between stakeholder groups.

Given the bureaucratic structure of social services it is not surprising that, theoretically and empirically, managers as high ranking officials were found to be the most powerful stakeholders in participation (Chapter 7). They control the process and it takes place on their terms. Young people rely on opportunities given to them by powerful people rather than through

exercising their citizenship rights or on a mandate from their peers. Their lack of knowledge of rights, experience of putting these into practice and alienation from adult structures used to develop policy hinder their participation in adult forums. The stakeholder interviews indicate that young people and front-line workers feel participation is service provider led. It will take some surrender of power by managers and evidence that the views of young people have shaped policy decisions and practice to convince young people that their voice has been heard and is valued.

Box 8.1: Summary of Recommendations

The United Kingdom should incorporate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into law to ensure children's civil, political, cultural, economic and social rights.

An independent Commissioner for Children's Rights in England should be established with the aim of influencing policy and practice, advising government and public authorities, conducting enquiries and monitoring progress.

All children should be conversant with their rights to participate and provided with opportunities to develop participation skills in their everyday lives.

Adult stakeholders - front-line workers, managers and elected members - should be given training in the principles and practice of a rights based approach to welfare provision that has a clear focus on participation. This should be included in professional social work training and training for elected members in corporate parenthood.

The Department of Health should establish requirements for directors of social services and elected members to uphold the UNCRC in social services departments. This should be monitored through arrangements already in place under the Quality Protects Framework and regular Joint Review Inspections conducted by the Audit Commission and Social Services Inspectorate.

The government clarifies its position on young people's rights to protection and participation and ensures that protection in the guise of welfare does not undermine their right to participate.

That young people should be supported by appropriately trained adults to share their experiences of their looked after status, identify areas for change and formulate a strategy to pursue these. This can be accomplished by widening participation of young people in the National Voice Project and other projects of this sort, both inside and outside social services.

That participation should be widened inside the organisation so that more stakeholders have experience of participating by moving away from exclusive reliance on small consultative groups.

That priority should be given to involving young people not currently involved in policy formulation – those in foster care, those placed outside the local authority, those in residential special schools, black and minority ethnic young people and young people with disabilities.

Social services departments should have in place policy statements that clearly express their aim to uphold the UNCRC, and objectives that demonstrate how this is to be achieved. It is the responsibility of all adult stakeholders to uphold and facilitate young people's rights to participate.

Social services practice should be informed by independent guidance devised and produced by The Children's Rights Officers and Advocates Association (CROA) and non-governmental organisations such as the National Children's Bureau.

Departmental decision making should operate within a strategic framework that upholds children's rights but that decision making should be devolved to local levels to make positive personal experiences possible, and to establish policy that reflects diverse needs and particularly those of sub-groups of service users (e.g. black or disabled young people, or young asylum seekers).

That the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders should be clearly drawn.

That once the participatory focus is decided upon, clear aims and objectives should be established so that the effects of participation can be measured and evaluated. Stakeholders should be clear about any limitations to participation, for example statutory obligations.

That those participating should be realistic about the extent and possibility of change.

That social service departments should be accountable to all stakeholders by reporting back the outcomes of their participation.

That what is heard should be acted upon or an explanation given as to why action is not possible.

8.3   Conclusions

This study identified the theoretical perspectives that inform the development of human rights for children and the potential they have to change the practice of welfare organisations. In Chapter 3 the review of recent research into childcare participation showed that these wider developments are making an impact on the theory and practice of statutory social work with children and young people, and are most obviously reflected in moves to involve them in case decision-making. These developments in themselves require welfare providers and all the stakeholders in the welfare system to acknowledge young people's rights and provide them with the means to exercise them. The provision of

information, support and changes in systems to reflect the needs of service users rather than providers are aspects of these developments. However, as the UNCRC Committee has noted, there is still much work to be done before welfare can be considered child and young person centred. In England there are still deeply held cultural positions and administrative structures that work against young people's participation as equal stakeholders and these are likely to take time to change (Matthews 2001).

Although all of the managers and elected members wanted to include young people's voice in policy making, there was no consensus on the basis of their involvement or any evidence that power to shape policy has passed to young people.

More research is needed into the most successful ways young people have engaged with adult organisations in the public sector to produce change. Lessons are there to be learned from fields such as community regeneration and other local government practice but we still know little about young people's participating as a group in welfare policy formulation and planning. Wider dissemination of successful participation and greater awareness by young people of the work of their peers in changing organisations may provide a platform for inspiration and empowerment in all areas of the lives of young people looked after. Government policy such as Quality Protects is fostering an increased awareness of the need for good quality children's services and the key role young people have in the way these are delivered. However, changing the organisational culture of social services departments will take some time while stakeholders gain knowledge, experience and confidence in the practice of participation.

Further research into the impact of Quality Protects in terms of the focus for participation and the perceptions of stakeholders would be valuable to assess progress towards the empowerment of young people. The implementation of Quality Protects may make significant changes to young people's participation in policy making if it focuses the minds of powerful stakeholders on their rights and on best practice in other arenas of young people's participation. Change will continue to be dependent on managers

who can influence organisational cultures to place young people at the heart of the policy process. All stakeholders, especially young people, need to be convinced that involvement is more than tokenistic if they are to fulfil the potential locked up in young people's willingness to help produce the best services possible.

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

This survey is investigating the current status of children and young people's contribution to policy formulation in social services departments. It will provide a measure of this type of activity in local authorities in England and Wales.

This work is supported by the Association of Directors of Social Services, and all of the information you provide will be regarded as confidential. If there is insufficient space for any answers you may wish to give, please use the reverse of this form.

Thank you for completing this questionnaire; all respondents will be provided with a short report outlining the results of the survey.
Contact: Robert Gunn 01604 735500

1.   Are young people involved in policy, strategy or planning functions in your social services department?

         Yes   ☐ please continue to complete questionnaire

         No   ☐ please explain reasons

....

....

....

2.   If YES, how many years have they been involved?

         0-4   ☐

         5-9   ☐

         10+ years   ☐

         Not known   ☐

3.   How many young people are involved at any one time?

        0-4 ☐

        5-9 ☐

        10-19 ☐

        20+ ☐

        Not known ☐

4.   Please state the ages of young people involved in participation

        0-4 ☐

        5-10 ☐

        11-17 ☐

        18+ years ☐

        Not known ☐

5.   What form does their participation take?

        Attendance at council sub-committee ☐

        Involvement in management meetings ☐

        Survey responses ☐

        Qualitative research ☐

        Youth forums ☐

        Other (Please Describe Below) ☐

....

....

6.   Please give examples of policy decisions that reflect young people's input at:

a)   Day-to-day level e.g. Menus in residential provision

....

....

....

....

6   b)   Major policy level e.g. Formulation of leaving care strategy.

....

....

....

....

7.   Is their participation written into formal departmental policy or strategy documents?

Yes   ☐

No   ☐

Not Known   ☐

8.   If YES please give examples, and provide copies:

....

....

....

....

9.   What benefits are there for your authority from young people's participation?
Please describe:

....

....

....

....

10. Are you aware of any difficulties your authority has experienced with young people's participation in policy making?

Yes   ☐

No   ☐

11.   If YES please describe:

        ....
        ....
        ....
        ....

12.   What strategies has your authority developed to overcome such
        difficulties?

        ....
        ....
        ....
        ....

13.   What for you is the most important aspect in working to involve
        young people in policy making?

        ....
        ....
        ....
        ....

Appendix 2: Survey Consent Letter

6th December 1998

'Young People's Participation in Social Services Policy Making'

Dear

Thank you for agreeing to take part in my research study. Your contribution will help to produce a picture of young people's current contribution to policy making in England and Wales. When the work is completed the results will be made available via the Association of Directors of Social Services. Any information that you provide will be treated confidentially and neither you nor your department will be identified in any reports produced.

Please spend some time thinking about the questions I ask on the questionnaire and I will contact you by telephone to record your responses. If you want to complete the form yourself, please do so; I have enclosed a prepaid envelope for you to return it to me.

I have written to your director to explain the project and provided a copy of the questionnaire for information.

If you have any questions about this project please contact me at the above address. I would especially like to talk to anyone else who is working in this area.

Many thanks for your co-operation,

Yours sincerely,

Robert Gunn CQSW, BA, MA

Appendix 3: Interview Consent Form

My name is Robert Gunn. I am doing research on a project entitled 'Young People's Participation in Social Services Policy Making.' University College Northampton supervises the project. I can be contacted at the address on the top of the page should you have any questions.

Thank you for agreeing to take part in the project. Before we start I would like to emphasise that:

- your participation is entirely voluntary;
- you are free to refuse to answer any question;
- you are free to withdraw at any time.

The interview will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to the project supervisors at University College Northampton. Excerpts from the interview may be made part of the final research report, but under no circumstances will your name or any identifying characteristics be included in the report.

Please sign this form to show that I have read the contents to you.

_____ (Signed)
_____ (Printed)
_____ Date

Please send a report on the results of the project:

     YES   NO   (circle one)

Address for those requesting a research report

_____
_____
_____

Appendix 4: Respondent Feedback

Young People and Policy Development

The following information is taken from a survey conducted in December 1998 and January 1999. Twenty percent of the social services departments in England and Wales were selected at random. This sample included equal numbers of each type of authority, county, unitary, metropolitan etc.

## Basic Information about Involvement

Young People Involved in Policy Making

No

Yes
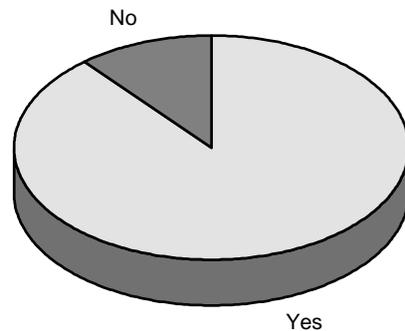
Most departments (89%) said that young people were involved in their policy, strategy or planning. Those who did not involve them (11%) were generally positive about involving them in future.

Number of Years Involved In Participation

60%

50%

40%

30%

20%

10%

0%

0-4 years   5-9 years   10+ years   Not known
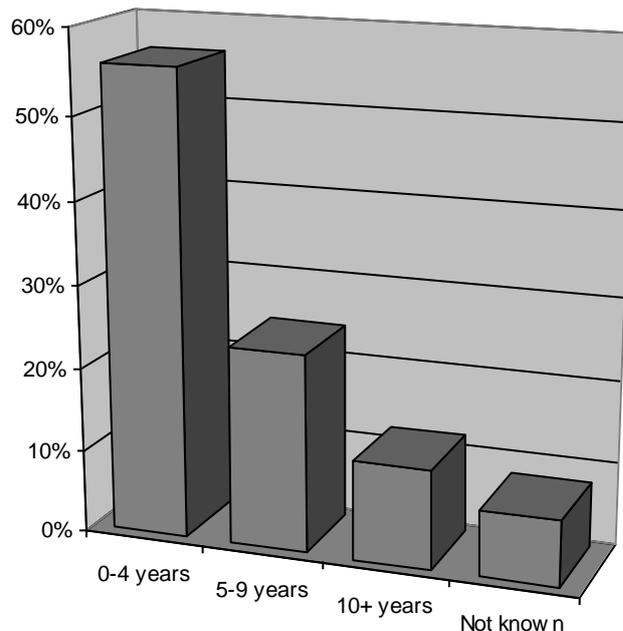
Of those who were working with young people, most said they had been doing this for up to four years (56%) However of these, nearly half (46%) were unitary authorities who have only been in existence for less than four years.

Number of Young People Involved In Participation At Any One Time
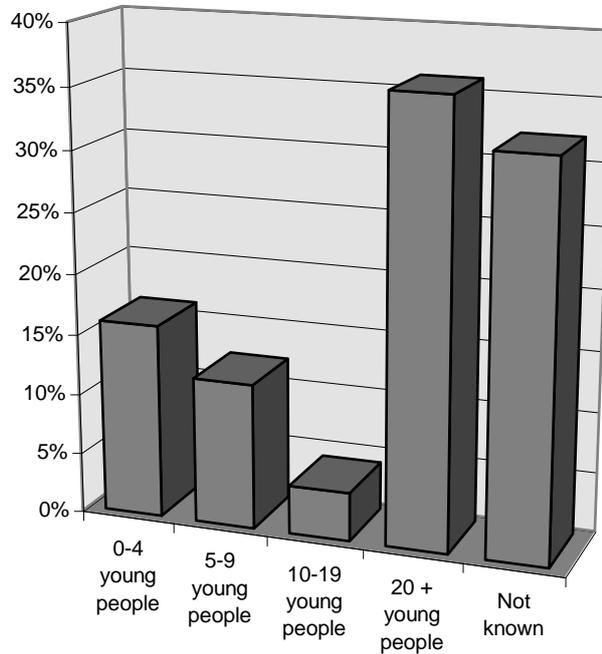
The number of young people involved showed a wide variation, some authorities working with over twenty at a time (56%), and others with four or less (16%) This may be connected to the methods of involvement being used and will be examined in future work. A significant number (32%) did not know how many young people were involved.

Ages of Young People Involved in Participation
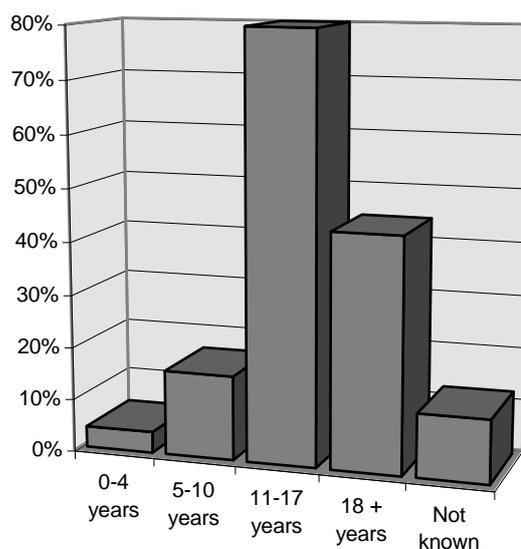
Most authorities worked with older young people (11 to 18+ years) in their participatory strategies, but a small number were working with pre-secondary school age young people.

What Happens?

Forms of Participation
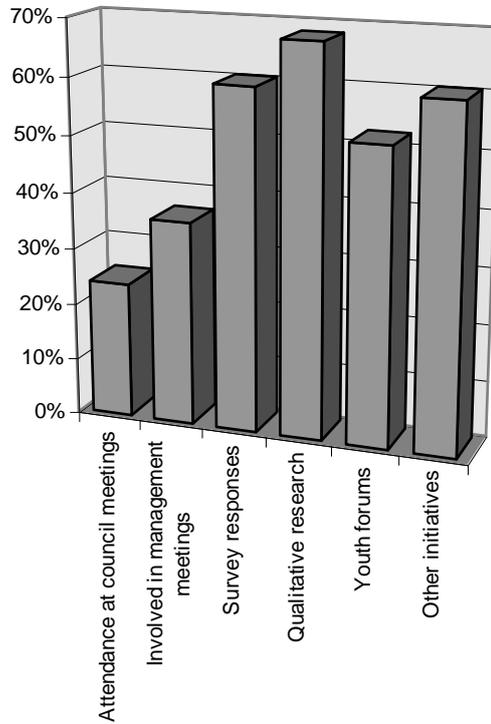
The most popular means of involvement were via some type of research strategy. Surveys and interviews were popular methods, as were youth forums. These methods can be described as being consultative rather than involving young people directly in policy making arenas, i.e. management meetings or meetings with elected members.

Other Initiatives
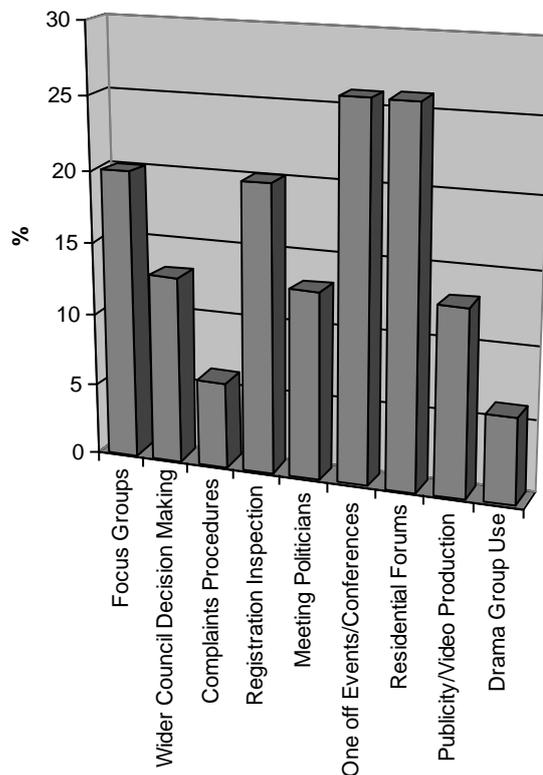
In the category of other initiatives were nine methods, the most popular of which were: one off events and conferences, residential care forums, focus groups and using the registration/ inspection processes.

Regular meetings in residential provision were the most popular example of participation at day to day levels, although only one respondent linked these into the wider management processes of the department.

At major policy level, involvement in the leaving care strategy was the most widely used example of the thirteen described.

Evidence of Participation

**Participation Written into Departmental Documents**
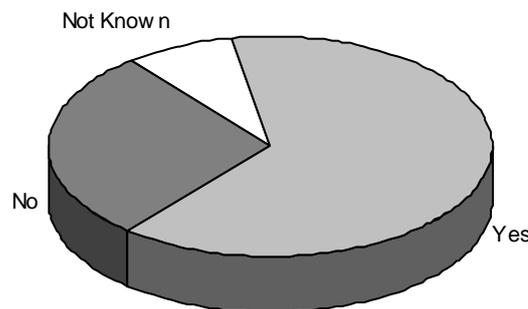
The majority of departments, (64%) had participation with young people written into their formal policy, strategy or planning documents. Popular examples were: as part of wider commitments to include all users of services, children's service plans, statement of children's rights or charters and review strategy documents. 28% did not have participation written into formal documents and 8% did not know.

Benefits and Difficulties

When asked to identify the benefits authorities gained from involving young people the majority said that it enabled the service user perspective or voice to be heard. Targeting of service was the next most popular reason. Empowerment, ownership of policies and an expectation to consult by the local authority all followed.

Difficulties With Participation
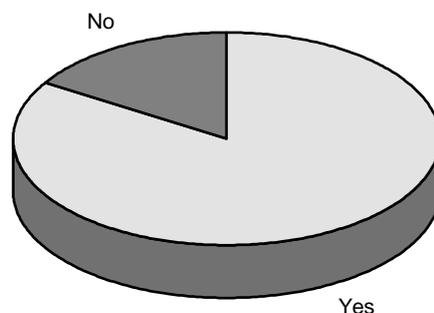
Most authorities that involved young people (84%) said that there had been difficulties in the practice of participation. Most often cited were: the timing/location of meetings, movement of young people, maintaining a group, finding effective mechanisms and avoiding tokenism.

Appendix 5: Our Borough Case Study Feedback Report

Report on Young People's Involvement in Policy Making in Our Borough Social Services.

The research carried out at Our Borough is part of a three-year project. The study is divided into two parts, a national survey of young people's involvement in policy and planning followed by an examination of the realities of this activity in three social work departments, of which Our Borough is one.

The interviews

This report is concerned with work going on in Our Borough and is compiled using data from eight interviews conducted in August 1999. Two representatives from each of the following groups – young people, front-line workers, elected members and managers – were asked to reflect on their past and present involvement in policy making, then to consider the future of this work. Informal, loosely structured discussions were used to allow people to raise issues that were important to them, in a way they felt appropriate. The transcripts of these interviews were then analysed and issues raised by more than one member of each group are presented here. The bullet points that follow are in the order that they emerged from interviews. They are not ranked or put in any priority. Significance will be assessed in the more detailed analysis that will be produced when the whole project is written up. Care will be taken over authority, as well as individual, confidentiality at that stage.

Research findings

- The management of Our Borough Social Services is committed to involving young people in policy making.
- Managers have set the agenda and driven this work forward.
- Social services are now good at listening, but not so good at responding to what they have been told.

- It is not clear what happens to information produced in consultation, where it goes and what effect it has.

- Establishing a regular dialogue between the parties involved is seen to be important.

- Young people want to be consulted and have a right to have their voice heard (not just in social services, but across the borough.)

- Young people are listened to more than they were in the past and social work practice reflects changes in society.

- Consultation needs to be a "normal" rather than special activity.

- A range of strategies is needed to allow young people to raise issues and comment, in the way that they as individuals feel appropriate.

- Staff turnover works against the establishment of the trust needed for young people to express their views.

- Social services are seen as a complex structure. This can make it difficult to locate the right person to sort out problems.

Conclusions

The interviews produced a very positive picture of consultation in Our Borough and the feeling was that all of the groups interviewed shared a vision of greater involvement by young people in the planning of their own lives and contributed to the way the department delivers services. Management is aware of the need to translate what they are being told by service users and front-line staff into policy and are working to achieve this. How each group fits in the policy making process was less clear and the practical problems of bringing people together to work on a shared agenda were highlighted.

Other research with service users has indicated that in order to be empowered, groups need to get together and share experiences, in order to define the issues that are important to them, and then set an agenda for change. The practical difficulties of young people doing this were highlighted by this research. Geographic isolation and a desire not to be marked out as different, work against such a strategy. Although using particular individuals or small groups is a way of addressing this, it can lead

to the voice of those on the margins not being heard and the failure to present views from across the spectrum of young people in the care system.

I would like to thank all of the people who gave up their time to talk to me and I hope that this short report will help with your desires to improve the ways young people are involved in influencing life in Our Borough. When this study is completed your contributions will play a significant part in the overall findings.

Many thanks,

Robert Gunn
CQSW BA MA

Appendix 6: Our Town Case Study Feedback Report

The research carried out in Our Town is part of a three-year project. The study is divided into two parts, a national survey of young people's involvement in policy and planning followed by an examination of the realities of this activity in three social work departments, of which Our Town is one.

The interviews

This report is concerned with work going on in Our Town and is compiled using data from interviews conducted in December 1999. Representatives from each of the following groups – young people, front-line workers, elected members and managers – were asked to reflect on their past and present involvement in policy making, then to consider the future of this work. Informal, loosely structured discussions were used to allow people to raise issues that were important to them, in a way they felt appropriate. The transcripts of these interviews have been analysed and issues raised by more than one member of each group are presented here. The bullet points that follow are in the order that they emerged from interviews. They are not ranked or put in any priority. Significance will be assessed in the more detailed analysis that will be produced when the whole project is written up. Care will be taken over authority, as well as individual, confidentiality at that stage.

Research Findings

- Management have set the agenda for participation and driven this work forward.
- All groups recognised that the department is committed to listening to young people.
- The change to unitary status has provided the opportunity for a fresh start, and the chance to create a department that responds to the needs and wishes of young people.

- The childcare department has a structured response to its work.
- The use of an 'exit interview strategy' is widely recognised as a means of collecting views that can be fed into the policy making process. All groups do not know about other initiatives.
- Although all groups are aware that information is collected from service users and used to inform policy making, it is not clear to all groups how users are kept informed about the impact their views have had on decisions taken about service delivery.
- Policy making is perceived to be taking place away from the level of service delivery.

Conclusions

Overall the interviews produced a picture of an organisation that is committed to listening to young people and wants their voice to be heard in the policy making process. Using highly structured working practices it is aiming to achieve high standards of service.

While there is evidence of intent, it not clear that all of the stakeholders are aware of the mechanisms being used to keep the voice of service users at the core of departmental thinking. It may be that following a period of rapid transformation, a period of consolidation is needed to embed ideals and practices of participation into the culture of the organisation. This would address the need to involve all stakeholders in the policy making process and ensure that they feel an influential and valued part of it by the establishment of a dialogue.

Levels of enthusiasm, commitment and energy are high across all of the groups charged with delivery, development and oversight of services. There was a positive forward thinking spirit among those interviewed.

The childcare department is using the views of young people to help shape the services it delivers. At present it is the organisation that is driving this work forward, but there is a desire to see service users start to be more active in defining the issues and policy being informed by a bottom up,

rather that a top down, approach. To do this, all of those involved need to feel part of the process; to have a stake in it and to know where their views fit in and what affect their input has had. Given the high levels of good will and energy that was expressed by respondents, this should not be difficult to achieve.

Other research with service users has indicated that to be empowered, groups need to get together and share experiences, then define the issues that are important to them and move on to set an agenda for change. The practical difficulties of young people doing this were highlighted by this research. Geographic isolation and a desire not to be marked out as different, work against such a strategy. Although using particular individuals or small groups is a way of addressing this, it can lead to the voice of those on the margins not being heard and the failure to present views from across the spectrum of young people in the care system.

I would like to thank all of the people who gave up their time to talk to me and I hope that this short report will help with your desires to improve the ways young people are involved in influencing life in Our Town. When this study is completed, your contributions will play a significant part in the overall findings.

Many thanks,

Robert Gunn
CQSW BA MA

Appendix 7: Our City Case Study Feedback Report

Report on young people's involvement in policy making in Our City Social Services.

The research carried out at Our City is part of a three-year project. The study is divided into two parts, a national survey of young people's involvement in policy and planning followed by an examination of the realities of this activity in three social work departments, of which Our City is one.

The interviews

This report is concerned with work going on in Our City and is compiled using data from interviews conducted in January 2000. Representatives from each of the following groups – young people, front-line workers, elected members and managers – were asked to reflect on their past and present involvement in policy making, then to consider the future of this work. Informal, loosely structured discussions were used to allow people to raise issues that were important to them, in a way they felt appropriate. The transcripts of these interviews were then analysed and issues raised by more than one member of each group are presented here. The bullet points that follow are in the order that they emerged from interviews. They are not ranked or put in any priority. Significance will be assessed in the more detailed analysis that will be produced when the whole project is written up. Care will be taken over authority, as well as individual, confidentiality at that stage.

Research findings

- All of the groups displayed a high level of awareness of Quality Protects and the expectation contained in it to listen to the voice of young people.
- All of the groups knew about the 'Reality' group and there was a consensus about its purpose. Other initiatives were not well known.

- Two groups highlighted the need to avoid tokenism in young people's participation. A recent policy on sexual health was cited as an example of this. Adults had drawn up the policy and a young person had produced the artwork for the cover, then been used in photographs when the policy was launched.

- Another group expressed similar feelings in terms of social services doing things that look good but do not change the situation for young people.

- People who give their views in policy making need and deserve feed back about how those views, have been used. An acknowledgement of the time and effort put in is important to make people feel part of the process. No groups were sure how best to achieve this, but all highlighted its importance

- There is a general aspiration to secure partnership across the functional divisions of the local authority which is required to make 'corporate parenting' effective. This sense of partnership is not yet a reality at the level of front-line services.

Conclusions

There is a feeling that front-line workers are not playing an effective part in the policy making process. Most groups felt that issues arising at service delivery level are not perceived to travel up the policy chain. Two groups recognised that workers may need to act as advocates for those young people who are not articulate or able to take part in the current participatory initiatives. This leads to the organisation missing out on valuable information drawn from day to day contact with young people.

The interviews produced a picture of an organisation that is aware of its responsibilities to listen to the voice of young people in its policy making and one that is looking beyond its own functional boundaries to include other parts of local government in the role of corporate parent. The Quality Protects initiative and recent Joint Review seem to have acted as catalysts for the formalisation of consultation and the most widely recognised feature of this is the development of the 'Reality' group.

This sense of commitment to involve young people in policy making was evident in all of the groups interviewed, but was tempered with an awareness that participation needs to produce real changes for young people looked after if it is to maintain credibility with all of those involved. There is a need for a shared vision of what constitutes consultation and of where it will lead and what benefits participants can expect. Those who have a stake in the process need to feel that they have a role to play if they are to continue to want to participate in the development of services. At present there is a sense that policymaking is remote from everyday experience.

The need to avoid tokenism was expressed widely. The example of a policy document written by adult's but giving the appearance of having involved young people was cited. Approaches of this type, however untypical do not enhance the credibility given to participatory exercises and can lead to increased levels of cynicism about their usefulness.

The need for the Department to be able to be hear the voice of young people as it arises in every day contact with workers was also highlighted. Those young people who are at the margins or whose experience has led them to distance themselves from social services still have views that can help shape the organisation. Their voices may be collected more easily from the experiences and advocacy provided by front-line workers than formal consultation mechanisms.

Information contained in Our City's Children's Services Plan and Quality Protects documents makes it clear that the department is fully aware of the need to involve young people and has plans in place to do this. The interviews conducted for this research show that while the intentions are clear, the relationships between stakeholders in the policy process are recently established and their full development will be important factors in the achievement of aims. This reinforces the observation that all those involved need to be aware of their part in the strategy and know that their input will be used effectively.

Other research with service users has indicated that in order to be empowered, groups need to get together and share experiences, in order to define the issues that are important to them, and then set an agenda for change. The practical difficulties of young people doing this were highlighted by this research. Geographic isolation and a desire not to be marked out as different, work against such a strategy. Although using particular individuals or small groups is a way of addressing this, it can lead to the voice of those on the margins not being heard and the failure to present views from across the spectrum of young people in the looked after system.

I would like to thank all of the people who gave up their time to talk to me and I hope that this short report will help with your desires to improve the ways young people are involved in influencing life in Our City. When this study is completed, your contributions will play a significant part in the overall findings.

Many thanks,

Robert Gunn
CQSW BA MA

Appendix 8: What Helps Participation in Matters that Relate to Children as a Group

Prepare thoroughly

- Clarify the purpose, aims and objectives – taking into account resources available.

- Have clear parameters about how much power and decision making will (or can) be shared with children. Be honest with them about this.

- Be clear and realistic about the extent and possibility of change.

- Consider who should talk part – is a representative sample of service users required? How can you include non-users of services? Have you included children not traditionally involved; those in foster care, those placed outside the local authority, those in residential schools, black and minority ethnic children, children with disabilities?

- Which method (s) would most suit the purpose and participants? A variety of different methods usually guarantee better information. Involve children in deciding this.

- Draw up an ethical statement, clarifying issues around consent (by children/parents), confidentiality, anonymity and disclosure.

- Should you consider developing a contract of participation? Will it include rewards?

- In planning, allow enough time to build up trust and rapport with participants.

- Ensure staff or facilitators have necessary skills.

- Consider the long term. Group participation tends to be one off exercises dealing with specific issues. Think how to establish more permanent channels for consultation and communication.

Think about recruitment

- Have available, in an accessible format, information for children about what is going to happen, what will be discussed, and who will be taking part.

- Consider factors such as gender, ethnic and religious background, sexuality, disability, age and ability as these may play an important part in children's experiences.

- Consideration should be given to whether participants have the necessary skills, knowledge, confidence, commitment and time to do what is being asked. Can you offer enough support to overcome these?

- Previous and current experiences of your organisation might affect commitment. Do you need to give more encouragement to take part, reassurances that participation will not affect the services children receive.

Plan for participants' special needs

- Consider the needs of disabled children. Difficulties with physical access, written text, communication, or lack of suitable equipment and support that may inhibit full participation.

- Provision may be needed to develop materials and mechanisms to enable the participation by children with English as a second language, sensory impairments or with severe/complex communication needs. Consider the use of translators, visual images and symbols on forms, or qualified signers. Telephone interviews might be appropriate with young people who have visual or reading/writing difficulties.

Consider the practicalities

- Consider the timing, and venue – is the venue intimidating for children? Do you need to make transport arrangements? Consider transport costs, accompanying adult support and the necessity for childcare.

Demonstrate respect

- Be aware that children will have their own agenda and be prepared to listen.

- Consider your choice of language, and avoid the use of jargon.

- Remember that children also have busy lives.

Provide effective follow-up

- Are there suitable mechanisms for feeding back outcomes directly to participants involved within a sensible time scale?

- Children want some indication that their voices have been heard, and some explanation of the outcomes. Tell them what it is intended to achieve in the short, medium and longer term.

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