



SEND Participation and Co-Production Commissioning Strategy

Introduction

At Together for Children Sunderland and Sunderland Clinical Commissioning Group, we recognise that children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) will be experts in how the services they use impact their lives and experiences. It's for this reason that our children's services need to be planned; created and reviewed with the lived experience and outcomes of children and young people at the core. In order to ensure that the services available to children and young people with SEND in Sunderland are helping them to progress and achieve, they need to be involved at every level of the commissioning process. This is known as co-production.

This strategy is informed by the [Participation and Engagement Strategy 2017-2022](#), and will serve as guidance for how we will meet Action Area 2 of the [SEND Strategic Commissioning Plan](#): *Strengthen co-production with families at a macro, meso and micro commissioning level*. We understand how important it is that children with SEND are able to inform services, and this strategy document will set out what we need to do to ensure that children and young people with SEND can actively engage and participate with the Integrated Commissioning Service in a meaningful way, and shape the services that we deliver.

Background

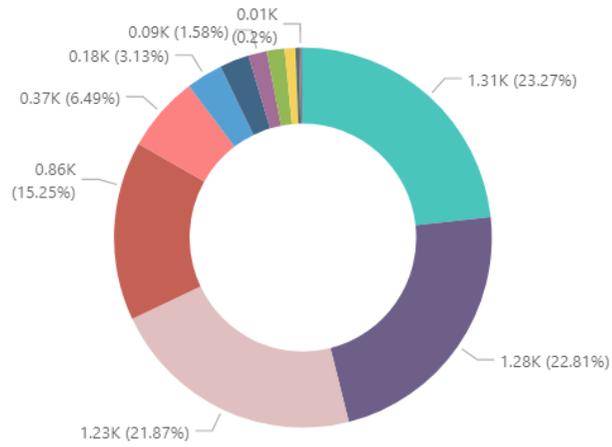
In Sunderland, there are 6,842 children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities who have an Education, Health and Care Plan or receive SEN Support. This accounts for 16.1% of all children and young people in Sunderland, 1% higher than the national average.

The primary needs of these children and young people are detailed on the next page, with Autistic Spectrum Disorder being the most common, followed by Speech, Language and Communication Needs; Moderate Learning Disability; and Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs.

Glossary of Terms

ASD	Autistic Spectrum Disorder
HI	Hearing Impairment
MLD	Moderate Learning Difficulty
MSI	Multi-Sensory Impairment
PD	Physical Disability
SLD	Severe Learning Difficulty
SEMH	Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs
SpLD	Specific Learning Difficulty
VI	Visual Impairment
SLCN	Speech, Language and Communication Needs
OTH	Other

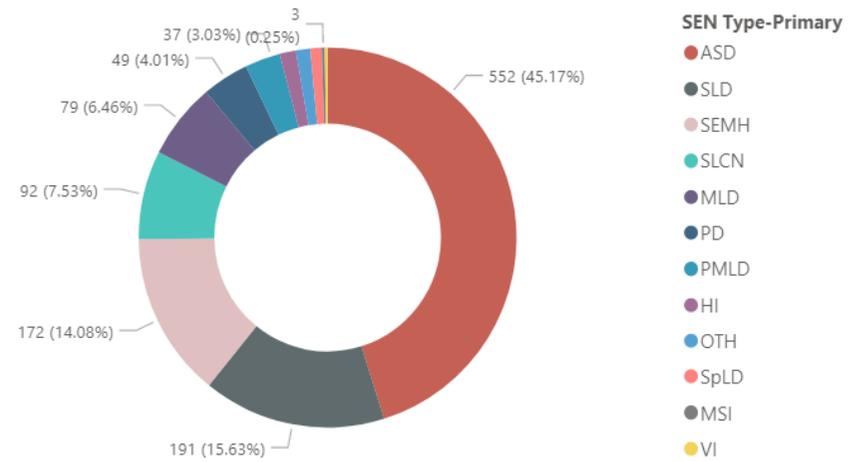
Summary of Primary Need (SEN support)



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SEN Type-Primary	Count	%
SLCN	1308	23.27%
MLD	1282	22.81%
SEMH	1229	21.87%
ASD	857	15.25%
SpLD	365	6.49%
OTH	176	3.13%
PD	141	2.51%
HI	89	1.58%
NSA	86	1.53%
VI	51	0.91%
SLD	19	0.34%
MSI	11	0.20%
PMLD	6	0.11%
Total	5620	100.00%

Summary of Primary Need (EHCP)



Summary of Primary Need (EHCP)

SEN Type-Primary	Count	%
ASD	552	45.17%
SLD	191	15.63%
SEMH	172	14.08%
SLCN	92	7.53%
MLD	79	6.46%
PD	49	4.01%
PMLD	37	3.03%
HI	17	1.39%
OTH	15	1.23%
SpLD	12	0.98%
MSI	3	0.25%
VI	3	0.25%
Total	1222	100.00%

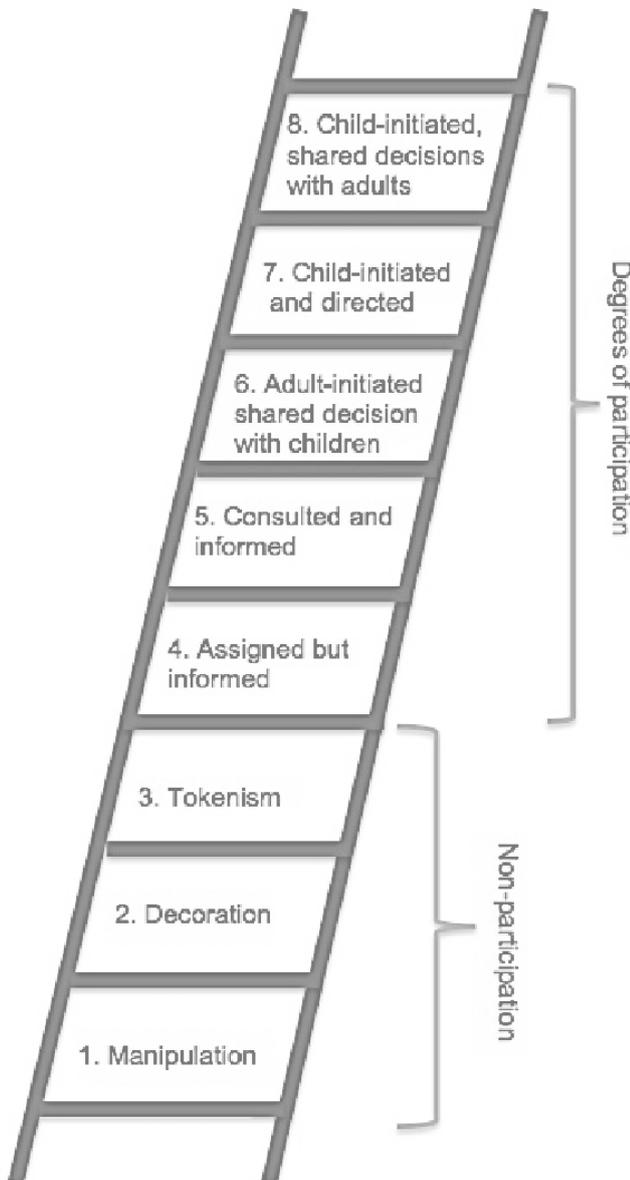
Children and young people 0-25 with SEND, Primary Need. Source: January/Spring Census for 2019/20 Academic Year

Children and young people with additional needs have traditionally been denied the opportunity to participate and engage in ways which will influence the services they use as information is not shared with them, or their access needs are not met in order for them to participate. Often times, the views of parents and carers are sought, but these may differ from the views of the child or young person. The aim of this strategy is to change this and prioritise the consultation of children and young people who have direct experience of the services that they use. This in turn will help create empowered children and young people who are active citizens who feel confident in taking part in decisions which affect them.

Participation models

Desk-based research allowed us to identify models of best practice when engaging with children and young people.

Ladder of Participation-Hart (1992)



Hart's model displays a spectrum of participation, with children at the bottom end of the ladder included, but with no decision-making power (non-participation); and children at the middle and top of the ladder displaying degrees of participation, actively involved and leading the activity, sharing decisions with adults.

Currently, although information about the services are given to the children and young people and their families, they have little to no say in how the service is run at a more strategic level. A lot of work has been undertaken by Together for Children Sunderland to ensure that children and young people and their families are able to make their own choices and have their views and aspirations incorporated in their individual care plans; this is not reflected at a service or strategic level.

Levels of Participation Model-Kirby et al (2003)

Another model is that of Kirby et al who identified four levels of participation; however, these are non-hierarchical, meaning that

	Children and young people's views are taken into account by adults	
Children and young people make autonomous decisions		Children and young people are involved in decision-making (together with adults)
	Children and young people share power and responsibility for decision-making with adults	

each level is as important as another, and would be selected based on the children and young people and their circumstances.

This provides a more realistic model of how participation and engagement would work in real life situations, based on the decision-making ability and understanding of the children and young people who are engaging.

Model of Child Participation-Lundy (2007)



Lundy's model of participation provides a tool to conceptualise a child's right to participation in decisions which affect them as set out in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which ensures that: children have the space to express their views; their voice is enabled; they have an audience for their views; and their views will have influence.

This model focuses on the four key elements to ensuring children can participate: Space, Voice, Audience and Influence. Each of these come with a 'checklist' to ensure that any consultation, engagement or participation activities are designed in a way which is enabling all children and young people to not only be heard, but to affect change in ways which will impact on them.

This checklist, and the points raised from other participation models will be fundamental in the design and planning stages of carrying out any work with children and young people. This will ensure that any involvement of children in our commissioning activities is not tokenistic, and that children and young people are given fair opportunities to participate and co-produce support, services and plans which they will benefit from.

Principles

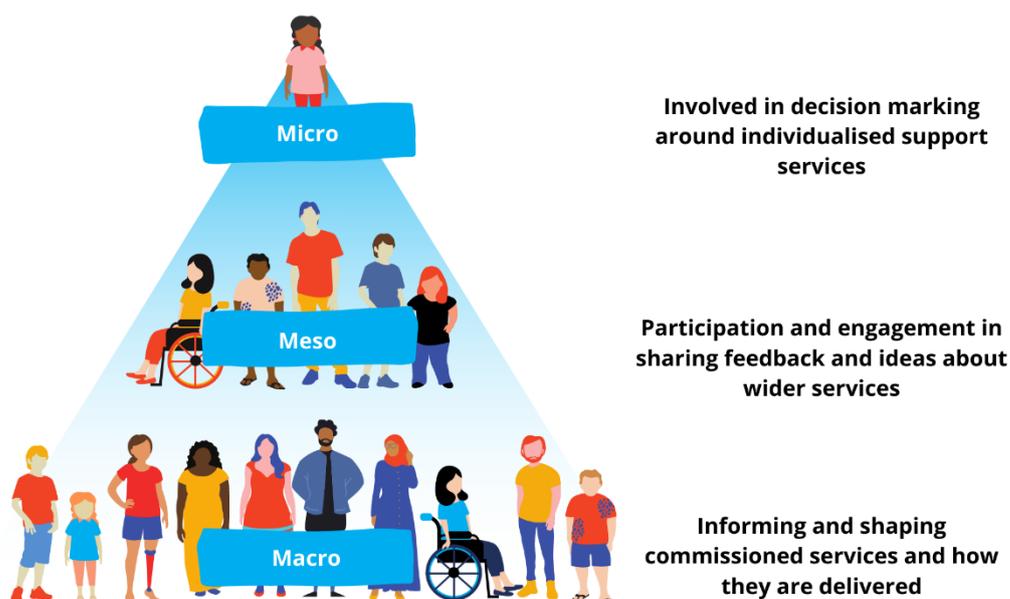
From reviewing the work of charities, academics and other local authorities who have produced work on the participation and engagement of children and young people with SEND, it is clear that there are two main issues which must be addressed: accessible information and mechanisms to aid expression of views.

In order for children and young people to engage and co-produce services in a meaningful way, they must be able to understand what it is they're being asked to do. To do this, we must ensure that all participation events are well planned to ensure that all children know what it is that we aim to do, how their participation will help both them and the Integrated Commissioning Service, and that the activities are something that all children can take part in regardless of age, ability and need.

This leads on to the second issue of mechanisms to aid expression of views. We know that children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities don't always communicate verbally, and this must be factored into any engagement activity design. Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) describes ways in which children and young people with additional communication needs can use a range of techniques to support or replace spoken communication and express themselves. This can include gestures, using voice output communication aids, signing, and word boards among others. Some children who use AAC will have aids and equipment that they use every day, whereas some may need help from people who know them well to interpret their gestures, vocalisations or signs. It is important that, prior to any engagement with children and young people, we prepare by asking them or their parents or carers how they communicate and adjusting any activities to suit their needs.

Together for Children Sunderland's Participation and Engagement team have already carried out some excellent consultation work with young people with SEND around Sunderland, however the focus of this work is primarily on ensuring that the participation and co-production of children with SEND is embedded throughout the commissioning process, but also in the ethos of all work carried out by Together for Children Sunderland and Sunderland Clinical Commissioning Group.

Three levels



As identified in the SEND Strategic Commissioning Plan, there are three levels of commissioning activity where children and young people with SEND should be involved in actively contributing towards designing the care services they use. The three levels are **micro**, **meso** and **macro**.

The **micro level** is support services which are individualised. This means that children and young people should be involved in making decisions that relate to them as an individual, for example: needs assessments; Education, Health and Care Plans; and annual reviews.

The **meso level** refers to a wider service. Engagement and participation at this level could involve measuring children and young people's understanding of a service, giving feedback about what they like and don't like about a service, or how clinics could be changed to make them more accessible. This could also involve service providers gathering feedback to share at contract monitoring and quality assurance meetings with Together for Children Sunderland.

The **macro level** is commissioning at a strategic level. This means children and young people with experience of commissioned services for SEND should be informing and having an opportunity to shape what services are available, and how these are delivered.

Stakeholder analysis

In order to design better support and services for children and young people, it is important that we map out the stakeholders and beneficiaries of these in order to gather the most relevant views and experiences. This demonstrates where we aim to get to with widening our participation and co-production opportunities. This is shown with the interest/influence grid below:

↑ Influence of stakeholders	<p>Children and young people with SEND who have not used support and services.</p> <p>Young adults with recent experience of children's commissioned services and support.</p>	<p>Children and young people with SEND who are using commissioned support and services.</p>
	<p>Teachers and health and social care practitioners who work with children and young people with SEND.</p>	<p>Parents and carers of a child or young person with SEND.</p> <p>Providers of support and services for children with SEND.</p>
	→ Importance of stakeholders	

From this, we can see that children and young people who are currently using commissioned SEND services are the highest priority group to be included in this work. Next, is children with SEND who are not currently using support and services; and young adults who have recently graduated out of commissioned services for children with SEND. The groups who will be kept informed of the work we are doing are parents and carers, practitioners who live and work with children with SEND, and also the providers of support and services.

It is important that we map out the groups of individuals whose views and participation are most needed to shape the SEND services delivered in Sunderland. In order to do this most effectively, we will be working with existing participation groups where possible, and partnering with voluntary sector organisations within the city who already have existing links with parents, carers and children and young people with SEND.

Challenges

Determining the scope was a challenge while creating this strategy. In order to make the best use of time and resources, it was decided that the initial phase will focus on commissioned education, health and social care services for children with SEND, rather than all children and

young people's service engagement and co-production. This work will formulate standardised processes to implement service user engagement, planning and reform work for Together for Children Sunderland and Sunderland Clinical Commissioning Group into the future.

Resource and capacity are a large consideration to undertaking this work, therefore it is in the best interests of all parties to make use of existing engagement channels both within Together for Children Sunderland and Sunderland Clinical Commissioning Group, and those set up by our partners in the community. This will ensure that we are collaborating with groups and teams who are experienced in working with the children and young people that we want to engage with, while also ensuring that we aren't duplicating existing work which is ongoing. In 2019, scoping work was carried out for the role of Young Inspectors and Commissioners, which was designed to be a program for children and young people to volunteer to work alongside Together for Children Sunderland's Commissioning Team and other children and young people who are users of services. The idea for this was that children and young people could collaborate with both commissioners and their peers in order to review and create services which meet the needs of those using them. Unfortunately, at the time, Together for Children Sunderland did not have the capacity or resources within the Commissioning team to carry this work forward. However, Together for Children Sunderland have since invested in additional capacity within the Participation and Engagement Team, therefore it is hoped that by working with both internal and external partners, the Young Commissioners role can be reviewed and expanded.

Another potential challenge of this work is overcoming the public health measures put in place during the current Covid-19 outbreak. At the time of writing this strategy, carrying out engagement activities in the usual face-to-face way in schools, clinics and other settings will be limited, therefore it is anticipated that until it is safe to do so, the bulk of the work will be carried out virtually using platforms such as Teams where possible. This will be reassessed regularly with the strategy team and following national public health guidance will remain the top priority at all times. Any engagement work which takes place in person will be subject to risk assessments, and Together for Children Sunderland staff who attend such sessions will be required to wear appropriate Personal Protective Equipment and practice good hand hygiene.

Action Plan



SEND commissioning cycle

Our future plans for participation and co-production will be fully incorporated into the commissioning cycle, meaning that there is no fixed end point for what we aim to achieve. The goal is for children and young people with SEND to be participating and co-producing with us at every stage, from planning and designing new services to reviewing and monitoring existing arrangements.

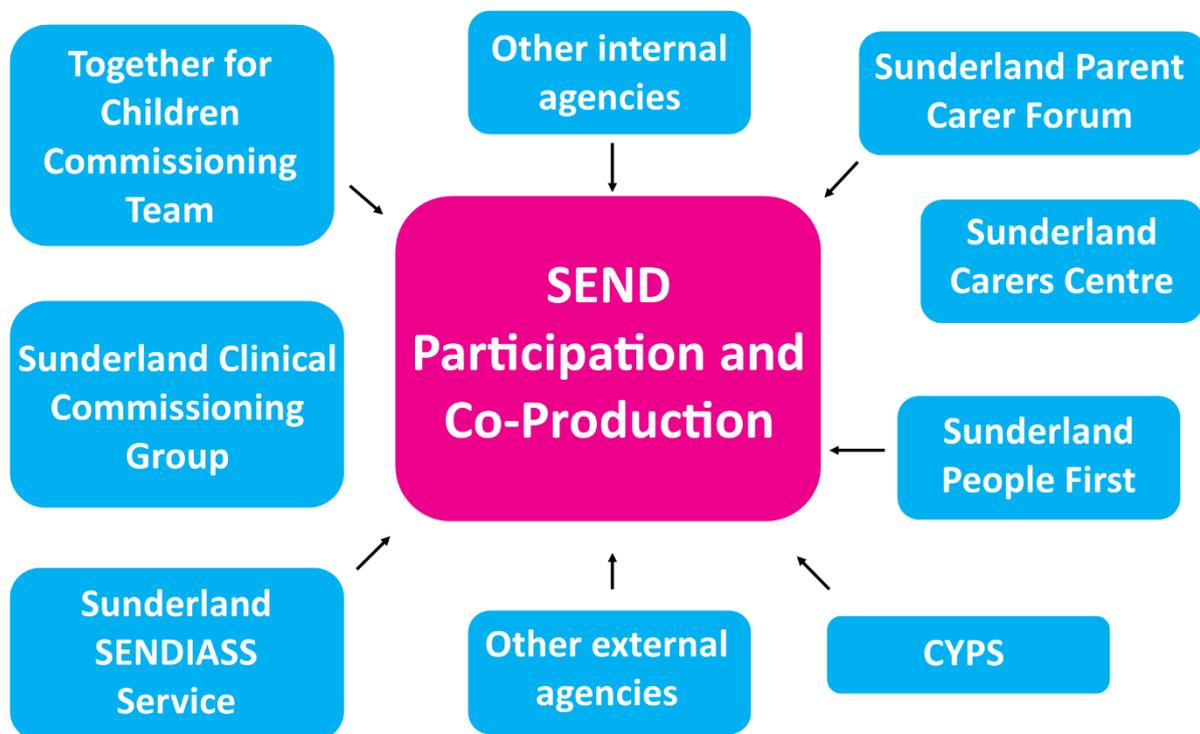
Before any engagement activity can take place, a working group will need to be set up to consult on and approve any planned engagement activities. This group will include representatives from: the Children's Integrated Commissioning Service; SEND; Participation and Engagement team; Sunderland Clinical Commissioning Group; Sunderland Carers Centre; Sunderland SENDIASS service; Sunderland Parent Carer Forum; Sunderland People First; and potentially others as needed.

Sunderland Parent Carer Forum are a local voluntary group of parents, carers and grandparents with children and young people aged 0-25 with SEND. They work to ensure that all parent carers have a voice in how services for children and young people with SEND are shaped and delivered. Using their co-production charter, we will embed the five principles that they have identified to work together in the right way. The principles are:

- Everyone is listened to.
- People feel empowered.
- We co-produce from start to finish.
- Person centred and solution focussed.
- Everyone is enabled to take part.

This group will need to work together to develop easy-read accessible versions of key documents, including but not limited to: Together for Children Sunderland’s SEND Strategic Commissioning Plan, and the Participation and Engagement Strategy 2017-2022. This will be the first strategic objective of the group.

Establishing partnerships: Education, Health and Care and Parent Carer Groups



Teams and organisations involved in establishing partnerships

The first element of this strategy will involve engaging with internal and external partners and organisations who already have trusted relationships and links to service users. This will be done by contacting organisations who are part of the SEND Strategic Commissioning Group and working with the Participation and Engagement team at Together for Children Sunderland. Several of these organisations already have engagement groups set up, and have trusted relationships with the children, young people and families they work with. This will enable us to learn from their practice, and see what tools and methods are being used currently to seek the views and experiences of children and young people with SEND.

Voluntary and community organisations have the expertise of working with the groups we are seeking to engage with; therefore it makes sense to use these links to access our target engagement groups.

Working this way will also help us to identify where more work needs to be done in establishing engagement groups, and which groups of children and young people with SEND aren't being engaged with.

Providers who are commissioned by Together for Children Sunderland and Sunderland Clinical Commissioning Group to provide support and services to children and young people with SEND will be approached to assemble engagement groups within their service. These providers will include schools and further education establishments from whom we commission educational placements, both maintained and independent, and also both mainstream schools with additionally resourced provisions, and special schools.

The data collected through engaging with groups of children and young people who are commissioned service users can feed into the quality monitoring process as part of the contractual arrangements with our service providers. This will be developed further to form a process for all services and teams working with children, young people and young adults with SEND to complete an annual participation audit with a focus on improving participation.

Establishing partnerships: Children and young people

It is hoped that by building relationships with the children and young people through both partner organisations and commissioned services, the Integrated Commissioning Service will have more transparent channels of communication with our service users. This means that we are better able to listen to the needs of these children and young people, and they are better informed about how their voice makes a difference to the services they use.

All of the children and young people who are engaged with as part of our commissioning activities and commitment to participation and co-production will be invited to become part of our Young Commissioners group. The Young Commissioners will not only work with the Commissioning team at Together for Children Sunderland as a consult and advisory group for future commissioning activities, but they will be a crucial part of evaluating commissioned support and services. It is hoped that with these children and young people, we can co-develop a toolkit to support good participation and co-production, which will be available to partners and families as part of our Local Offer.

Joint review to improve service offer

The review stage of the commissioning cycle will be where all of the materials and data gathered through the activities are collated. This data is likely to take several forms, such as photographs of mind maps; physical creations which are creative expressions of the views and experiences of children and young people; and transcripts of focus groups and interviews.

Data analysis will then take place, and the key findings of this will be shared with the Strategy Working Group for approval, and the Young Commissioners will be consulted in order to decide on any recommendations for change.

Recommendations will then go through the governance structure, and a report will be presented to Strategic SEND Commissioning Group and the Sunderland Children's Integrated Commissioning Group. Once any changes to support and services used by our children and young people with SEND have been made, an easy-read document detailing how their voices influenced change will be circulated to all children and young people who took part in that engagement activity.