

# Guidance for Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC) on participation by children and young people in decision-making

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## 1. The purpose of this guidance

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to CYPSC informed by the current policy context and to provide a series of practical steps in engaging children and young people in decision-making.

## 2. Policy Context

*Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014 – 2020* is the first overarching, cross government framework for children and young people aged 0 to 24 years of age. This framework comprises a number of constituent strategies, such as the *National Youth Strategy (2015-2020)*, the *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making (2015-2020)*, and will also include the forthcoming Early Years Strategy.

Under the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* Framework and the constituent strategies, in particular the *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making (2015 – 2020)*, the importance of participation by children and young people is underscored as a key principle and practice in the development of all policies, services and initiatives that affect their lives.

All Government departments, State agencies and associated structures (including Children and Young People's Services Committees) have commitments in the aforementioned strategies and report to DCYA on implementation on an annual basis.

The *Blueprint for the Development of Children and Young People's Services Committees (2015)* was developed by the DCYA as part of its role in providing strategic and policy direction to this initiative. This policy document not alone sought to regenerate the development of CYPSC, but also outlined key changes with regard to the role, remit, age-range, resourcing and representation of CYPSC. CYPSC act as the structure whereby services can work together in a coordinated, collaborative and systematic manner to achieve shared outcomes for children and young people as well as acting as a critical infrastructure bridging national policy with local provision.

The Blueprint includes the commitment to promote best practice in participation through:

- Support of national initiatives that promote participation of children and young people in decision-making
- Co-ordination of interagency training in participation practice locally
- Consulting and ensuring participation of children and young people who are outside of the established structures ('seldom heard') groups
- Ensuring active participation and contributions from all members across all sectors
- Ensuring that all sub-groups will have regard to the views of children and young people

Tusla, the Child and Family Agency are also actively involved in advancing the participation agenda. Tusla has a Participation toolkit to support Tusla staff to facilitate child and youth participatory practice at every level of Tusla and in every engagement with a child or young person. It outlines:

- The context and rationale for child and youth participation
- Guidance in the application of the Lundy model of participation (*see page 7*)
- Examples of activities that can support participatory practice.

[www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla - Toolkit \(web version\).pdf](http://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tusla_-_Toolkit_(web_version).pdf)

The National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision Making (2015 – 2020) includes the following actions relating to CYPSC:

<b>G14.6</b> Children and Young People's Services Committees will put structures and mechanisms in place to ensure children and young people's active participation in planning, development, delivery and evaluation of children's services.
<b>G14.3</b> Local Community Development Committees will collaborate with <u>Children and Young People's Services Committees</u> and <u>Comhairle na nÓg</u> in the planning process for the community element of Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs).
<b>G21.3</b> Guidance on engaging children and young people in decision-making in the work of Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC) will be developed by the DCYA in consultation with CYPSC.
<b>G21.9</b> A mechanism will be developed to ensure that initiatives undertaken by Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC) to involve children and young people in decision-making are regularly reported to the DCYA.
<b>G21.10</b> A mechanism to share information and resources between CYPSC and the Children and Young People's Participation Hub will be identified and developed.

### **3. The importance of ensuring that children and young people have a voice in decision-making.**

Children and young people have a right to participate in decisions that affect their lives. With the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)<sup>i</sup> in 1992, Ireland committed to ensuring that the voices of children and young people are heard and that their opinions are given due weight in matters that affect them. This is supported in all of the aforementioned policy documents.

However, it is not merely policy that highlights the importance of participation by children and young people. Indeed, many service providers and practitioners who work with and for children and young people will attest to the necessity and impact of ensuring the participation of children and young people in enhancing individual and organisational outcomes.

As such, there is a growing body of evidence on the benefits of participation by children and young people in decision-making across a range of measures, including improved services, policies, research, active citizenship and, most importantly, improvements for children themselves and for society generally.<sup>ii, iii</sup> Improved services are among the most measurable benefits of children and young people's participation in decision-making. For example, recent studies indicate that using children and young people's views in the development and evaluation of healthcare service provision can have a significant influence on health outcomes<sup>iv, v, vi</sup> and reduce healthcare usage<sup>vii</sup>.

#### **4. How can CYPSC ensure children and young people have a voice in decision-making?**

It is acknowledged that the age-span (0-24) of children and young people covered by CYPSC is broad, containing a range of demographics and developmental stages. As such it may not be feasible or appropriate to adopt and apply a single mechanism for the engagement of children and young people. Nor might a single undifferentiated approach be adequate in seeking such participation, as very often the needs and aspirations of children and young people and the themes and target groups are diverse and varied.

Rather, while a number of mechanisms are suggested below, it is critical that a shared range of principles are adhered to and the context fully recognised when considering these options.

- **Representation by children and young people at CYPSC meetings**

At the discretion of each CYPSC, and upon full consideration, young people can be invited to sit on the CYPSC, one in the 18-24 age range and the other in the 12-17 age range. In such cases it may be open to seek representation from young people aged 18-24 who are members of local organisations, youth services, Youth Advisory panels, Student Councils or colleges (third level or further education). With regard to the young person in the 12-17 year old category these could be invited from the local Comhairle na nÓg.

These young people could bring a personal youth perspective to the work of the CYPSC, but would not be expected to represent all young people. However, they could advise the CYPSC on issues of concern to young people that have arisen in the Comhairle na nÓg or other youth group/initiative. Support for these young people should be provided by the nominating body (e.g. the Comhairle na nÓg, the nominating Education and Training Board, or nominating College etc).

If the above approach is being considered it is crucial that appropriate preparatory work and ongoing support is provided to ensure that engagement with the young person on the CYPSC is accessible, respectful and productive.

▪ **Structured engagement by CYPSC with children and young people**

CYPSC can avail of the opportunity to engage with transition year students as part of their community involvement work. CYPSC members could also attend Comhairle meetings to seek the views of children and young people.

▪ **Utilising the range of existing participation structures for children and young people:**

CYPSC can avail of already existing structures such as:

- EU Structured Dialogue (Young Voices) which comes under the DCYA *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* National Policy Framework implementation structures
- The Comhairle na nOg National Executive
- Tusla Participation structures
- Public Participation Networks

▪ **Utilising creative mechanisms or fora to seek the voice, views and vision of children and young people.**

- Sub-groups could hold themed participation events such as “Agenda Days” to bring the voice and opinion of children and young people to CYPSC and inform the CYP
- Engage with Youth Leadership or Youth Participation structures large enough to accommodate diverse youth in terms of ability/disability; LGBTI/Straight; Ethnicity; Rural/Urban; Gender; Health/Economic diversities etc
- Work with early years providers in identifying issues for younger children
- Consult with Primary school children by linking with local school principals or the Irish Primary Principals Network
- Attend the AGM of the Comhairle na nÓg at which young people identify the issues of greatest concern to them
- Consult with with local youth groups and organisations
- Consult with Student Councils in Post Primary schools or Student Unions in Third Level Colleges.
- Engage with Tusla Participation Structures
- Engage with Public Participation Network Linkage Groups
- Engage with Community Training Centres
- Engage with networks of young people engaged in self-directed activities

- **Encourage your young people to seek a place on the CYPSC National Steering Group**

Two young people, aged 18-24, will sit on the CYPSC National Steering Group for a 2-3 year term. These young people will be selected from all young people on local CYPSC who put their name forward for the National Steering Group and who are nominated by the local CYPSC Co-ordinator. These young people will be supported to link with youth representatives in local CYPSC to discover issues of importance around the country. The role of the young people will be to bring youth issues arising at CYPSC and a personal youth perspective to the work of the Steering Group.

- **Build on the good work already started in many CYPSC**

Since 2011, many Children and Young People's Services Committees have been engaging with children and young people on issues such as early year's services, mental health services, addiction services and identifying the local needs of children and young people. Much of this work has been done with the Comhairle na nÓg, which is the nationally recognised structure for participation by children and young people in decision-making. The Roadmap at Appendix 1 provides clear guidance for CYPSC on their role and responsibilities in engaging with their local Comhairle na nÓg.

Working with young people from Comhairle na nÓg remains an important part of the work of CYPSC, particularly in the development of broad-ranging services, policies and initiatives, such as the Children and Young People's Plans (CYPP), recreation facilities, education services, youth services, mental health services and other child and youth related initiatives.

Many CYPSC already engage with local youth services and organisations to excellent effect and this work also remains critical to ensuring the effective participation of children and young people in CYPSC decision-making.

The importance of ensuring the participation of seldom-heard children and young people is paramount and is already central to the work of many CYPSC. (*see page 9*)

The term 'seldom heard' is described by Kelleher et al. (2014, p.53) as an umbrella term to describe young people from an extensive range of backgrounds and life experiences whose voices typically are not heard in decisions that affect them. Kelleher et al. note that the experience of having fewer opportunities for seldom heard young people to participate resonates in the broader international literature. The World Health Organisation (2010) for example outlines that young people with disabilities have fewer opportunities to participate in public as opposed to private decision-making. The challenges associated with identifying, accessing and engaging with seldom heard young people have been identified as contributing to their under-representation in decision-making. (Kelleher et al., p.53). The international literature also notes that the benefits of participation by marginalised children and young people have been described as resulting in their improved self-esteem and assertiveness, feelings of empowerment and access to information and skills (Prout et al., 2006; Willow, 2010; Head, 2011, p. 544.).

Accordingly, in the development of more targeted initiatives, such as disability services, pre-school services, initiatives for children in care, initiatives for early school leavers and others, CYPSC should, through their membership structure or linkages, continue to engage with specific cohorts of children and young people, who are involved in or affected by the issues concerned. This engagement can be carried out through liaison with CYPSC member organisations or other local/regional groups with expertise in these specific areas.

CYPSC also need to ensure that they are using best practice in involving children and young people in decision-making. This can be done by availing of the support and expertise of the DCYA Participation Hub and from collaborating with the existing expertise embodied within the CYPSC membership (services working with early years, school-aged children, young people and young adults).

▪ **Get support and guidance from the DCYA Participation Hub**

The DCYA Children and Young People's Participation Hub was established in 2017 and will be the national centre for excellence on children and young people's participation in decision-making, to support implementation of the *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making (2015-2020)*. Contact details for the Hub are [www.hubnanog.ie](http://www.hubnanog.ie) and email is [hubnanog@dcya.gov.ie](mailto:hubnanog@dcya.gov.ie)

Building on existing good practice, the role of the Hub will be to:

- Create practice standards, resources, toolkits, and training materials to mainstream good practice across the civil and public service, NGOs and elsewhere
- Conduct training of facilitators in creative and age-appropriate consultation and participative methodologies
- Conduct training in children's rights and children's participation in decision-making
- Promote best practice and be at the forefront of innovation in participation
- Build and maintain a strong network of key stakeholders from government departments, state agencies and the non-government sector
- Support and advise on the design and development of child and youth participation strategies
- Establish a network of experts, who will engage with the Hub in promoting and supporting third parties to build children and young people's participation into their work
- Form partnerships with third-level and adult education institutions to oversee development of education on children's rights
- Develop a repository of information on participation initiatives, projects and research
- Develop a website to inform and educate the general population, particularly children and young people themselves, about their participation rights
- Establish an online children's participation database of national and international good practice and literature
- Showcase, promote and share good practice through seminars, conferences and other events, and forge links and networks with international partners
- Ensure that all Hub initiatives and actions are underpinned by a strong evidence base

It is envisaged that CYPSC will play a prominent role in feeding examples of good practice on children's participation initiatives to the Hub to assist in building a strong national repository of

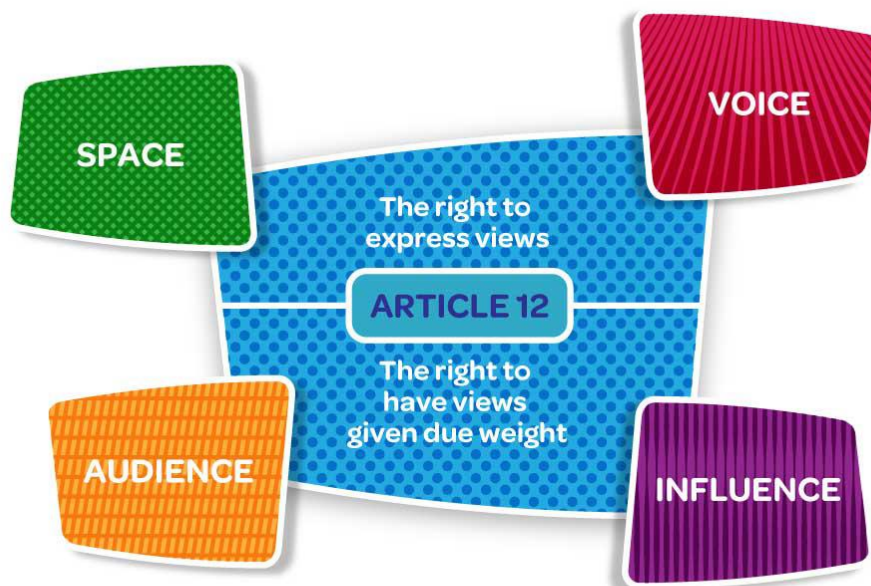
information. The Hub will have personnel, information and practical resources to support organisations and groups that are working on the ground on children’s participation initiatives.

## 5. What model should CYPSC consider in involving children and young people in decision-making?

The *National Strategy on Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-making (2015-2020)* is underpinned by Lundy’s Model of Participation<sup>viii</sup>, which is grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and focused on a rights-based approach to involving children in decision-making. The model values all forms of participation in decision-making, but also highlights the importance of the impact and outcomes of participation.

This non-hierarchical model of participation can be used by CYPSC in involving children and young people in decision-making as a means of ensuring that such engagement is meaningful and feeds into local policy and service provision.

### 5.1 Lundy’s Model of Participation



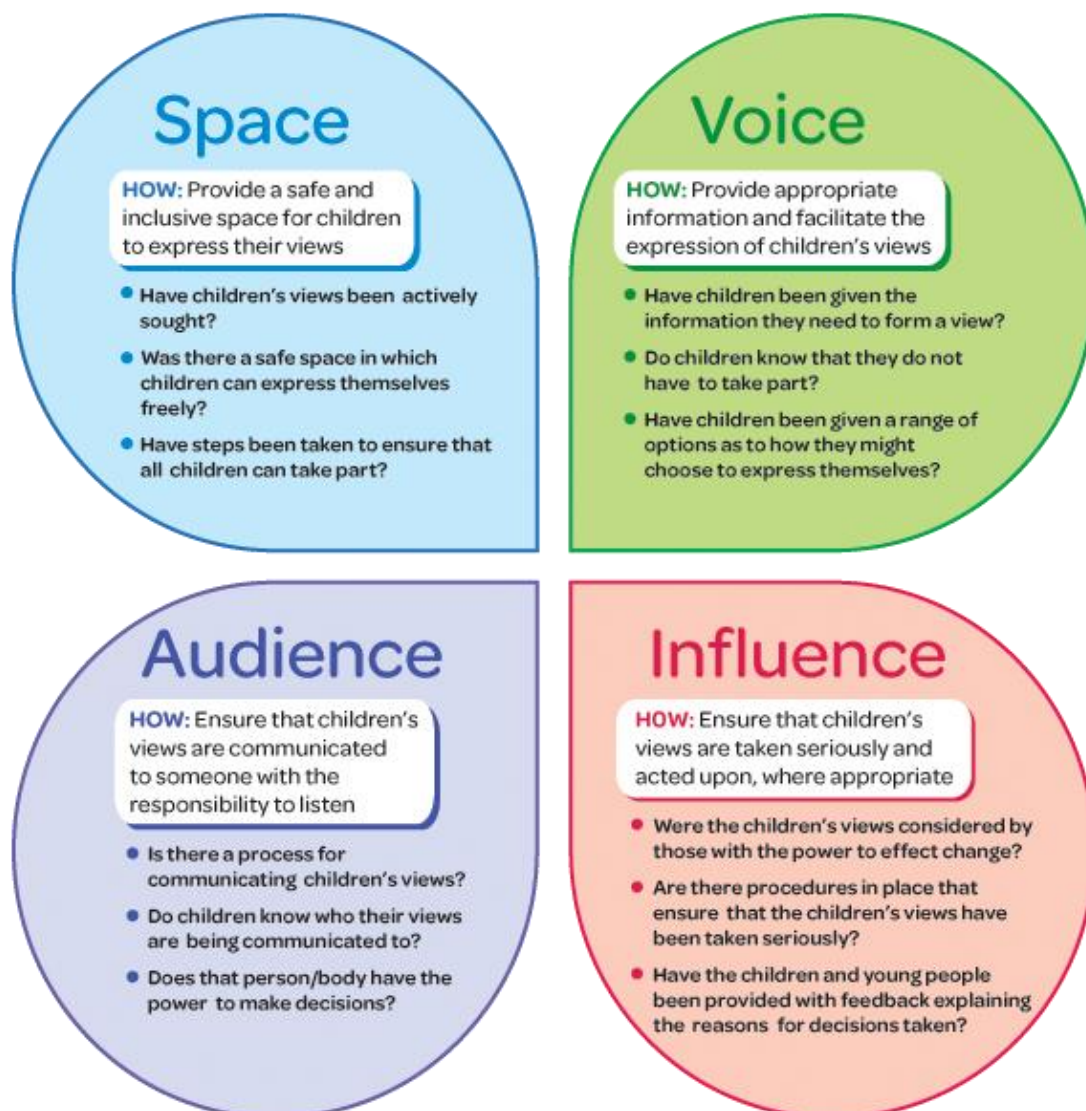
This model provides a way of conceptualising Article 12 of the UNCRC which is intended to focus decision-makers on the distinct, albeit interrelated, elements of the provision. The four elements have a rational chronological order:

- **SPACE:** Children must be given safe, inclusive opportunities to form and express their view
- **VOICE:** Children must be facilitated to express their view
- **AUDIENCE:** The view must be listened to.
- **INFLUENCE:** The view must be acted upon, as appropriate.

As part of the development of the National Participation Strategy, Lundy developed a checklist for participation (*see below*) in consultation with representatives from Government departments and state agencies. This checklist aims to help organisations, working with and for children and young people, to comply with Article 12 of the UNCRC and ensure 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 is referred to as the voice model checklist.

Although developed to assist in the implementation of Article 12 of the UNCRC, Lundy’s model and checklist are applicable to participation of young people up to the age of 24.

## 5.2 Voice Model Checklist





## **6. What practical steps can CYPSC take in using the voice-model and checklist to involve children and young people in decision-making?**

It is important to ensure that children and young people are involved in decision-making in the development of the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) and in CYPSC programmes and initiatives. It is critical to ensure that the issues of concern to seldom-heard children and young people are sought and included in the development of the CYPP. While seldom-heard children are present in all the settings below, it is important to actively seek their voices and work with organisations that represent such children and their families. Bell et al. (2008) found evidence which suggests that directly targeting the involvement of seldom heard young people in mainstream participation structures can increase the likelihood that they will become involved in them.

It should be recognised that CYPSC are using a range of mechanisms to identify the issues that are important to children and young people themselves as part of the preparation of the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP). Many of these are outlined in the following diagram illustrating the practical steps for involving children and young people.

## Practical steps for involving children and young people in the development of CYPSC programmes and initiative

1. Identify the specific children and/or young people you need to consult with or involve in the development of a programme or initiative or in response to a specific theme

2. If appropriate, consult with the local Comhairle na nÓg and other established local structures

3. Develop a draft mechanism for involving children and young people in the programme or initiative by the group or individual appointed by the CYPSC

4. Refer to the Lundy Voice Model checklist and consider all questions in the checklist with reference to the draft mechanism proposed

5. If required seek support from the DCYA Participation Hub, including information about possible partners, similar initiatives, guidance on age-appropriate methodologies, evaluation and preparation of a report on the process

6. Finalise the methods of involving children and young people in the initiative or programme, using the children's participation Hub database of good practice and literature ([www.hubnanog.ie](http://www.hubnanog.ie)) and other relevant resources

7. Where resources permit, evaluate the participation of children and young people in the programme or initiative.

8. Report on the outcome of participation initiatives to the DCYA Policy Innovation Unit, who will share good practice with the DCYA Participation Hub.

9. Share good practice locally and across CYPSC to assist knowledge exchange.

## APPENDIX 1

### Engagement between Children and Young People’s Services Committees and Comhairle na nÓg

All Children and Young People’s Services Committees will build effective engagement with their local Comhairle na nÓg:

- in the planning and delivery of appropriate policies, services and initiatives and
- in supporting the work and initiatives of Comhairle na nÓg.

#### Respective roles of Comhairle na nÓg and Children and Young People’s Services Committees

**Comhairle na nÓg** are local councils for children and young people, aged 12-17, that give them a voice on the development of local policies and services. They are the responsibility of the 31 Local Authorities and are the recognised national structure for participation by children and young people in local decision-making under *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014-2020* and the *National Strategy on Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-making (2015-2020)*. Local authorities are named as the most appropriate agency to house structures that give children and young people a voice in local decision-making in the *Revised European charter on the participation of young people in local and regional life (2003)*<sup>ix</sup>.

The Comhairle na nÓg gets young people’s voices heard in two ways: by working on topics of importance to young people and by acting as a consultative forum for adult decision-makers in the locality.

Every Comhairle na nÓg holds an Annual General Meeting (AGM), to which children and young people are invited from schools, local youth clubs and other projects. Attendance ranges between 80-200 young people at each local AGM, at which participants identify local topics of importance to them. A Comhairle na nÓg Committee is elected at the AGM and is responsible for working on the topics identified during the coming year, as well as being the consultative forum that works with decision-makers.

Comhairle na nÓg are part-funded by the DCYA Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund, which is managed by Pobal in cooperation with the DCYA. One of the criteria for funding is proof of engagement with the local Children and Young People’s Services Committee.

**Children and Young People’s Services Committees** are a key structure identified by Government to plan and co-ordinate services for children and young people in every county in Ireland. The overall purpose is to improve outcomes for children and young people through local and national interagency working.

At local level, the CYPSC are county-level committees that bring together the main statutory, community and voluntary providers of services to children and young people. They provide a forum for joint planning and co-ordination of activity and for oversight of local policy and provision, to ensure that children, young people and their families receive optimum services. Their role is to enhance interagency co-operation and to realise the five national outcomes set out in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014-*

2020. One of the six ‘transformational goals’ highlighted by *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* is to ‘listen to and involve children and young people’.

## Reporting requirements

- **Comhairle na nÓg (funded through Local Authorities)**  
Local Authorities must report on the level of engagement between the Comhairle na nÓg and the local Children and Young People’s Services Committee in the Annual Report of the DCYA Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund.
- **Children and Young People’s Services Committees**  
Children and Young People’s Services Committees report on their engagement with Comhairle na nÓg in the development and implementation of the three-year Children and Young People’s Plan (CYPP) and in the CYPSC Annual Programme of Work.

## Responsibilities of Children and Young People’s Services Committees

- All Children and Young People’s Services Committees will involve Comhairle na nÓg, along with other youth participation structures where appropriate, in the development of their 3-year Children and Young People’s Plan (CYPP).
- The Children and Young People’s Services Committee will report on engagement with the local Comhairle na nÓg in the CYPSC Annual Programme of Work and Progress Reports.
- A member of the Children and Young People’s Services Committee National Steering Group will attend the Comhairle na nÓg AGM each year and where appropriate, use the event to inform its work.
- An appropriate representative from the Children and Young People’s Services Committee National Steering Group will develop a relationship with the Comhairle na nÓg or become a member of the Comhairle na nÓg Steering Committee.
- The Children and Young People’s Services Committee will seek support or information from the Comhairle na nÓg on relevant issues.
- The Children and Young People’s Services Committee will provide feedback to the Comhairle na nÓg on relevant issues.

## Responsibilities of Comhairle na nÓg

- The Comhairle na nÓg will feed into the 3-year Children and Young People’s Plan (CYPP).
- Local Authorities will report on the level of engagement between the Comhairle na nÓg and the local Children and Young People’s Services Committee in the Annual Report of the DCYA Comhairle na nÓg Development Fund.
- The Comhairle na nÓg will engage with the Children and Young People’s Services Committee at appropriate points, once an issue has been identified and young people have sufficient capacity.
- Comhairle na nÓg members/adult organisers/DCYA Participation Officers will attend Children and Young People’s Services Committee meetings, as agreed with the CYPSC Chairperson.
- Comhairle na nÓg members or adult organisers will seek support and information on relevant projects from the Children and Young People’s Services Committee.
- The Comhairle na nÓg will provide feedback to the Children and Young People’s Services Committee on relevant issues.

## References

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- <sup>ix</sup> Council of Europe (2003) Revised European charter on the participation of young people in local and regional life.