Children's Information
Improving lives through better listening and better data

Embedding Voice in System Transformation

Practical Approaches for Families First and Beyond

![Children's Information]

About the Children's Information Project

The Children's Information Project is a five-year strategic initiative funded by the Nuffield Foundation to understand and test how local authorities use information about children and their families to improve lives.

The project aims to test the effectiveness and implementation of ethical approaches to children's information use.

The project team comprises researchers from the Universities of **Oxford** and **Sussex**, the **London School of Economics**, and **Research in Practice**, and four local authority sites: **Hampshire, North Yorkshire, Oldham, and Rochdale**

At each site, the project team is exploring how mixed methods of children's information collection, incorporating qualitative and quantitative information, can support each other to **build a better understanding of children's lives, as the basis for an improved service offer.**

Core to the approach is a desire to ensure that diverse voices - including those of children, young people, families and practitioners - **are heard more clearly within children's information, and that these voices influence how the information is gathered, shared, processed and used.**

Transformation: Families First Partnership Programme

- Launched earlier this year, FFP is a large-scale transformation process.

- Research in Practice's professional networks have highlighted many questions related to the reforms, such as: *the role of the Family Help Lead Practitioner, multi-disciplinary supervision, thinking whole family, building partnerships and what makes multi-agency working effective.*

- This is one of several transformation processes which will affect children's services (NHS 10 Year Plan, Best Start in Life), all of which have a focus on voice and information – the lens we are applying today

- As this is a live transformation process, and as such an emerging area of practice, there are not documented evidence reports or case studies. Instead, we are coming together to reflect and share practice

Children's Information

Objectives

The objectives of the session are to:

- Reflect upon the importance of voice in transformation with a focus on the Families First programme.

- Spotlight case studies from local areas which have incorporated voice and information into the process (not necessarily social care)

- Share practical approaches and real-world examples for meaningfully engaging children, young people, and families in system transformations, ensuring that voice is central to redesign and delivery—not just quantitative data.
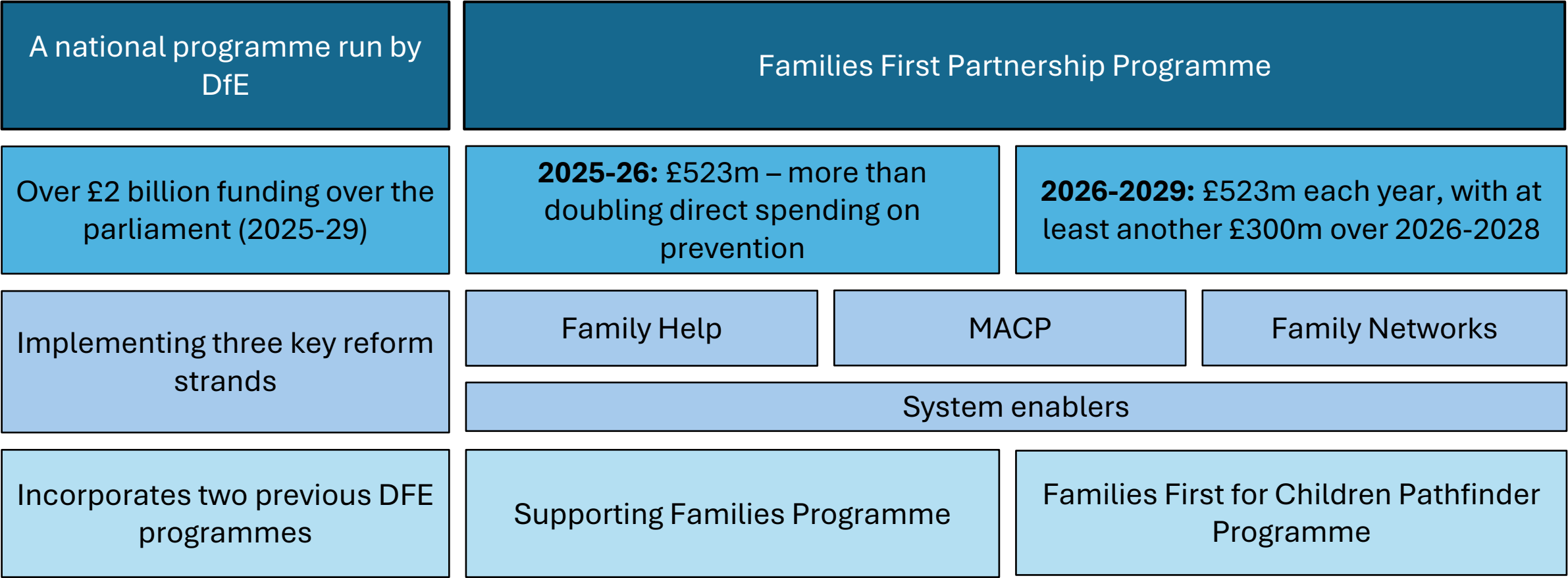
Families First Partnership Programme: using the voice of children and families in co-design

11/2025

Programme overview

A national programme providing implementation support across three CSC reform strands, working in partnership with local areas

Our goal for the programme is to rebalance the system of support away from crisis intervention and towards earlier help delivering on the government's mission to provide children with the best start in life, keep children safe and break down barriers to opportunity.

A national programme run by DfE	Families First Partnership Programme	
Over £2 billion funding over the parliament (2025-29)	**2025-26:** £523m – more than doubling direct spending on prevention	**2026-2029:** £523m each year, with at least another £300m over 2026-2028
Implementing three key reform strands	Family Help	MACP	Family Networks
	System enablers	
Incorporates two previous DFE programmes	Supporting Families Programme	Families First for Children Pathfinder Programme

Key considerations for implementation in 2025/2026

2025/26 is a transformation year – we want to ensure that all local areas have the time and resource to do this work well, allowing local partners to recognise the benefits whilst continuing critical work to support and protect children and families.

1 Areas should have ambitious plans for change but we recognise that practice or processes may not change immediately. We know this year will feature transformation alongside business-as-usual delivery. Local areas should be mindful of **making safe decisions** during this period of transformation and that appropriate local governance is in place.

2 **Multi-agency working is critical to the success of these reforms**, and we have emphasised that co-design should take place between safeguarding partners, education and childcare settings, other relevant agencies and crucially also include families.
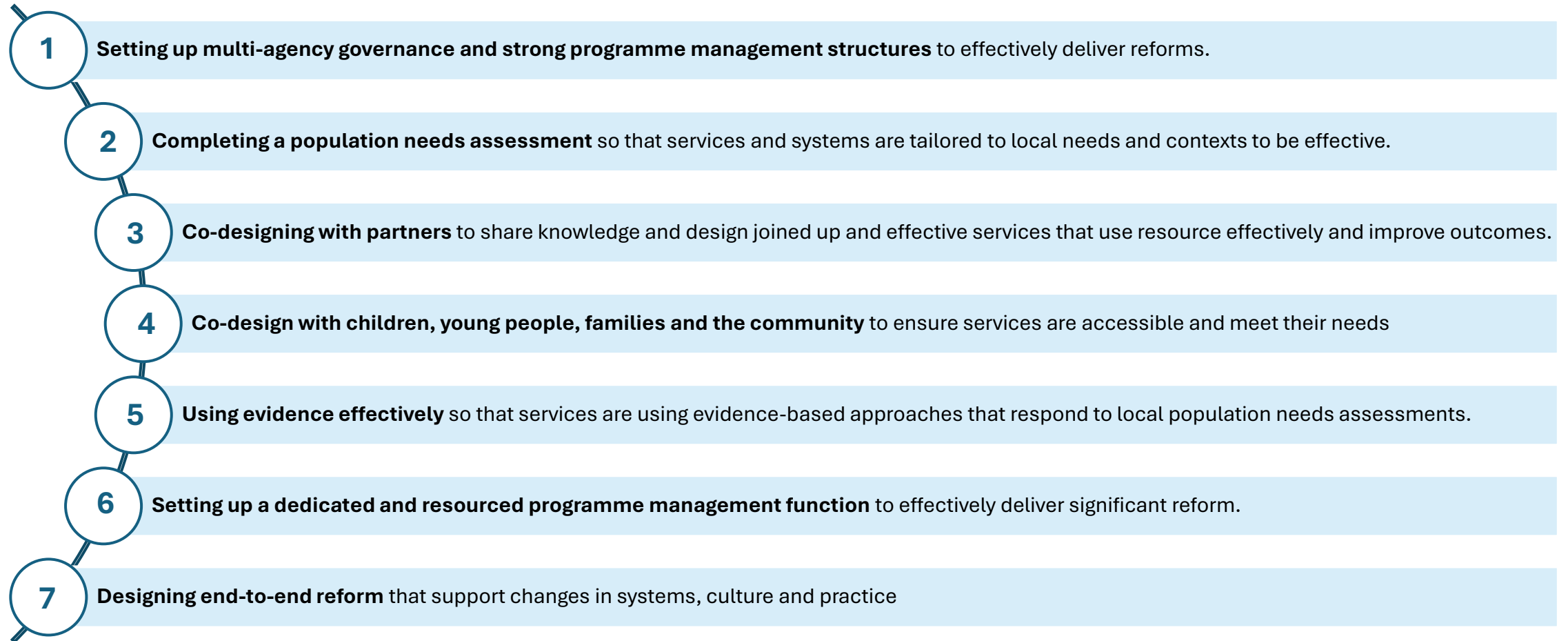
3 We are not being prescriptive with the design of local systems to enable local flexibility. We have been clear that **co-design should be based on a robust population needs assessment** to ensure it reflects the local context and responds to needs.

Key activity for 2025-2026

Learning from the Pathfinder programme identified some key activity to successfully implement the reforms:

1 **Setting up multi-agency governance and strong programme management structures** to effectively deliver reforms.

2 **Completing a population needs assessment** so that services and systems are tailored to local needs and contexts to be effective.

3 **Co-designing with partners** to share knowledge and design joined up and effective services that use resource effectively and improve outcomes.

4 **Co-design with children, young people, families and the community** to ensure services are accessible and meet their needs

5 **Using evidence effectively** so that services are using evidence-based approaches that respond to local population needs assessments.

6 **Setting up a dedicated and resourced programme management function** to effectively deliver significant reform.

7 **Designing end-to-end reform** that support changes in systems, culture and practice
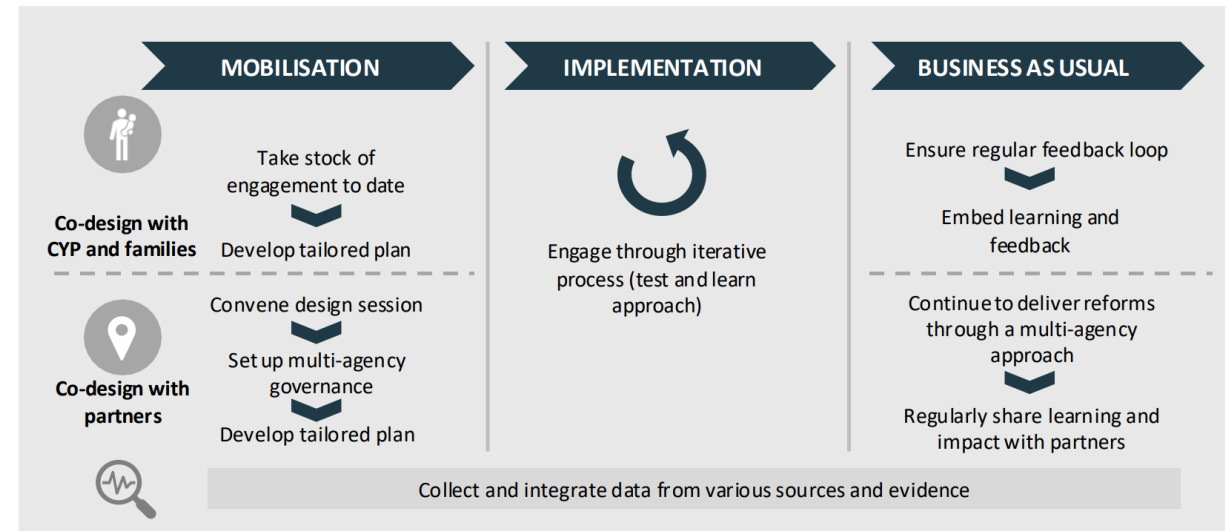
Co-design and family voice

Co-design means designing services together with partners, communities and people with lived experience, amplifying the voices of children, young people and families. Learning from our Pathfinder programme helped us develop some core principles for effective co-design with children and families:

- Planning early and allowing sufficient time for engagement.

- Avoiding reliance on the same individuals or groups.

- Offering flexible formats (virtual and in-person, various times and locations).

- Making materials accessible, sharing questions in advance.

- Where appropriate, consider remunerating people for their time and expertise.

- Building on existing knowledge and relationships to foster trust and avoid engagement fatigue.

- Showing how their feedback has shaped services ('you said, we did').

Summary of recommended process

MOBILISATION	IMPLEMENTATION	BUSINESS AS USUAL

Co-design with CYP and families
Take stock of engagement to date
Develop tailored plan

Co-design with partners
Convene design session
Set up multi-agency governance
Develop tailored plan

Engage through iterative process (test and learn approach)

Ensure regular feedback loop

Embed learning and feedback

Continue to deliver reforms through a multi-agency approach

Regularly share learning and impact with partners

Collect and integrate data from various sources and evidence

Capturing the voice of children and families: case studies

Pathfinder areas collected the voices of children and families in various ways. Below are two examples:

As a Pathfinder, **Wolverhampton** has enhanced its methods for capturing the voices of children and families to regularly inform service reform. They engaged 25 families with diverse experiences in the social care system to co-produce the change plan. Wolverhampton's Families on Board group, consisting of young people who have accessed social care services, met fortnightly to assist in co-producing the reforms and the Family Hub provision. Additionally, the Guardians forum, a group for parents and carers with experience using these services, also met fortnightly to provide input into the reforms.

Lewisham focused on the continued development of materials with families and young people, for families and young people. This included creating a family friendly 'One Assessment' document and form, an information deck, a programme overview for parents, consent forms, family friendly programme-specific leaflets, and feedback forms and surveys.

Q&A

Questions for DfE about integrating voice into system design.

Ethical and Effective Information Use

- Embedding 'voice' in system design and transformation goes beyond simple consultation. It involves a commitment to actively listen and integrate diverse perspectives at every stage of system design and operation.

- This includes the voices of children, young people, parents and carers, practitioners, managers, other professionals and the wider community.

- Embedding voice in system design and transformation is essential for creating inclusive, transparent, and ethical systems that prioritize human-centred values, social equity, and sustainability.

- It ensures that systems are not only functional but also accountable and responsive to the needs and concerns of diverse stakeholders.

Voice as...

1 A Foundation for Democratic, Just Systems

2 A Driver of Trust, Transparency, and Accountability

3 A step to Relational and Human-Centred Practice

4 An Ethical Compass

5 A Bridge for Understanding and Informed Consent

The framework for ethical and effective information use

- Working with the four local authority sites, the project is developing a common 'framework for effective information use' that incorporates key design features and practices which have been identified in the relevant literature and through intensive fieldwork as essential dimensions of effective information use.

- The framework is intended to serve as a common definition to articulate what ethical and effective information use means in practice.

- 8 areas of practice and learning essential to implementation with two systems enablers supporting these practices

Infrastructure and Governance

Behaviours and Culture

Theory of Change

Draw from national datasets

Use broad sources of local information

Bring voice into co-design of information systems

Enhance voice information in aggregate & strategic reporting systems

Improve voice in operational information use

Map system
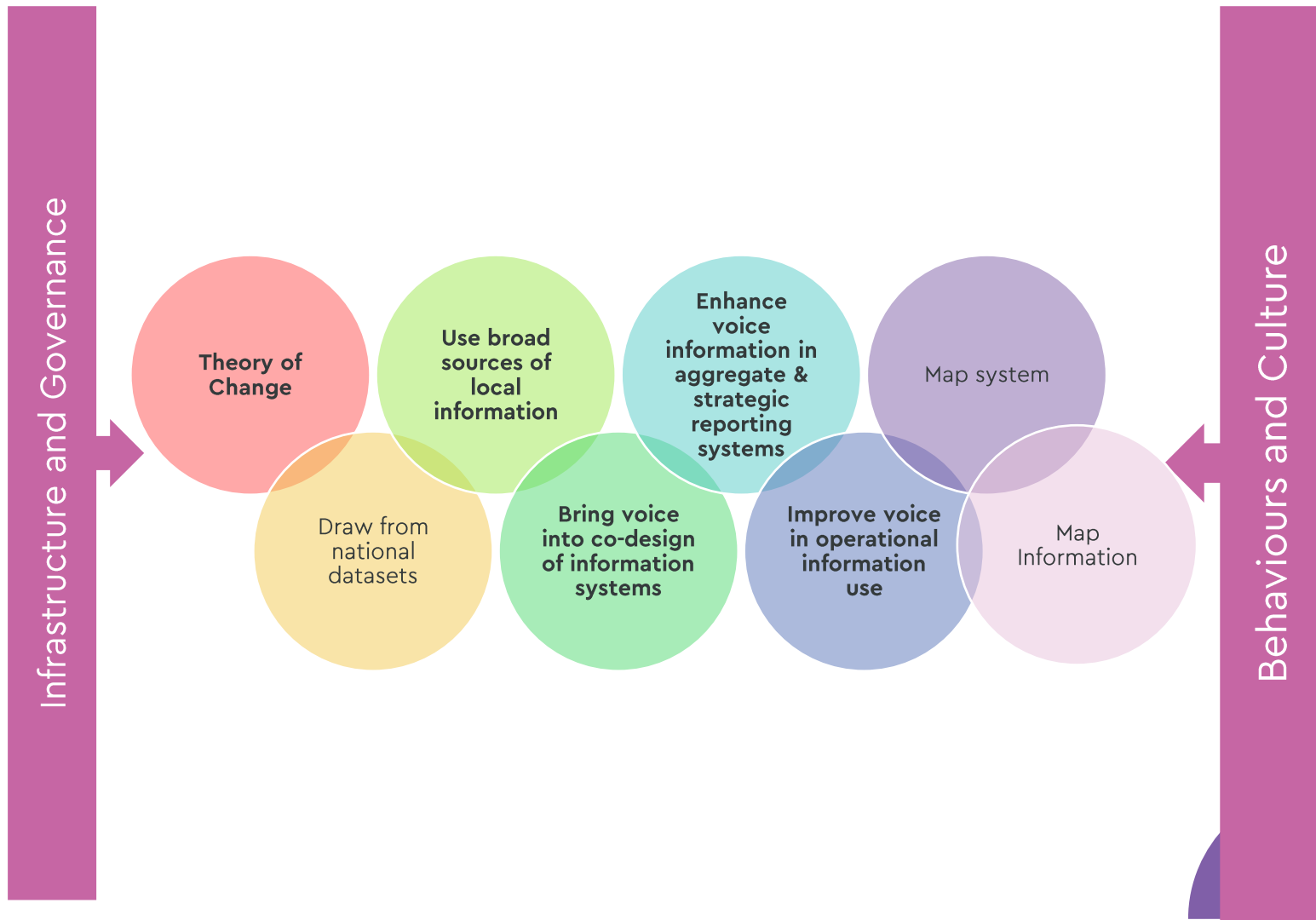
Map Information

Examples from Pilot Sites

Enhance voice information in aggregate & strategic reporting systems

North Yorkshire: development of care leaver measures of success dashboard that directly insert qualitative voice information of care leavers.

Improve voice in operational information use

Hants: development of voice note to ensure parents voices are represented in referrals, formalising GDPR practice from district team.

Oldham: developing ways of prioritising parents and practitioner voice and more holistic information.

Transformation without voice

|	Risk	Consequences
Designs that don't meet real needs:	Programmes are based on assumptions, not lived experience.	Services misalign with family realities, leading to poor uptake or ineffective interventions.
Implementation failure:	Lack ownership because reforms ignore their practical insight and/or lived experience.	Resistance, burnout, and uneven practice across teams.
Low sustainability:	Reforms dependent on top-down compliance fade once funding or mandates end.	No cultural shift; the system reverts to old behaviours.
Missed learning opportunities:	Without feedback loops, systems cannot self-correct.	Persistent inefficiencies and unaddressed service gaps.
Erosion of relational practice:	Removing voice prioritises processes over people.	Families experience care as transactional and bureaucratic.
Reinforcement of systemic inequities	Without diverse input, systems reproduce existing biases	Transormation leads to increased inequalities

What's already happening?

- Integrating voice is not new for local authorities

- Spotlighting some good work that's already happening

- These examples aren't linked to the Children's Information Project
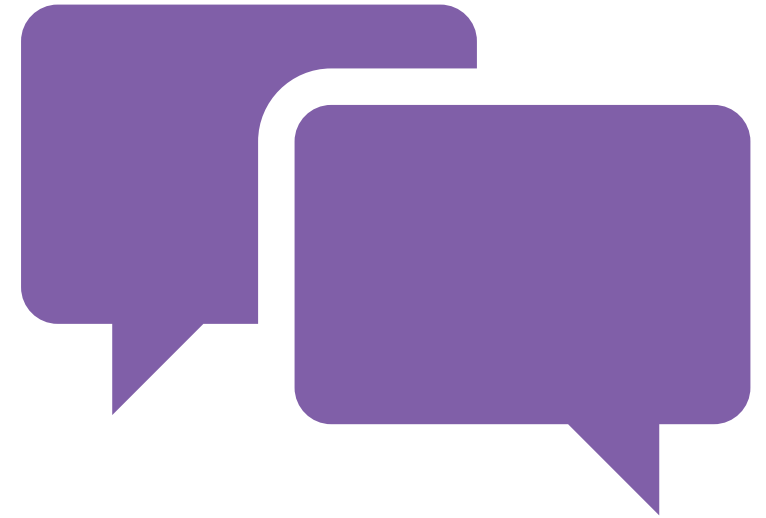
Developing a strategic outcomes framework and an integrated SEND system in Rochdale

- Aim - shift the system's focus from 'outputs' (what services are delivered) to 'outcomes' (the difference made to children's lives).

- A multi-agency partnership that directly involved over 60 children and young people with SEND and around 40 parent carers.

- The work was guided by the principles of Outcomes-Based Accountability (OBA) and established the infrastructure and cultural foundations for an integrated, data-informed, and outcomes-focused SEND system.

- Impact - The seven co-designed outcome statements became the "golden thread" and shared vision for all services and changed behaviours and culture.

Follow this link to the Rochdale Case Study

Understanding Need (Using Broad Sources of Information) - Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) of the 0-25 SEND population.

Co-designing the Framework (Bringing Voice into Co-design) - Initial outcome themes were developed with professionals and parent carer representatives.

Developing Systems (Infrastructure and Governance) - A **Logic Model, multi-agency data dashboard, and a joint commissioning audit tool.**

Enabling Appropriate Action (Improving Operational Information Use) - Dynamic Support Register (DSR), which identifies CYP with learning disabilities and/or autism at risk of inpatient admission

Transforming the Children's Services complaints process in Sefton

Aim - to transform the complaints process into one that prioritises user experience and empowers families and young people. The project is structured around three key objectives:

- Enhance compliance monitoring and learning

- Amplify the voice and participation of families, young people, and care Leavers

- Improve accessibility and understanding of the complaints process

The project is rethinking how voice should be gathered, processed, and used and uses a range of strategies and systems.

Follow the link to Sefton example

Understanding Need (Using Broad Sources of Information) - engaged directly with parents, carers, young people, and the workforce.

Changing Behaviours and Culture (Gathering & Processing Voice) - Introduced "Pre-Complaint Conversations", Piloting community "Drop-In" clinics, culture of continuous improvement.

Improving Infrastructure and Governance (Co-designing Information Systems) - Single Point of Entry (SPOE), Enquiry Tracker, Co-designing user-friendly process flowcharts.

Enabling appropriate action (Improving Operational & Strategic Information Use) – Developing user centred systems, new forums, and new way to participate and share voice.
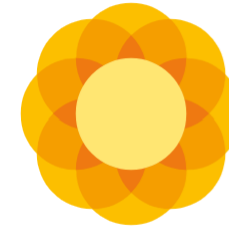
Mind of My Own: An app to help young people express their views

[Mind of my Own](#) is an app to help young people express their views to their care team.

They can use it to prepare for meetings, request a change in their care, or to ask for a problem to be sorted out. It works by prompting them to enter their views, structuring what they say into a statement, and then delivering the statement to their care team or another trusted adult.

[Mind of My Own| Birmingham Children's Trust](#)

Benefits of using apps to gather voice
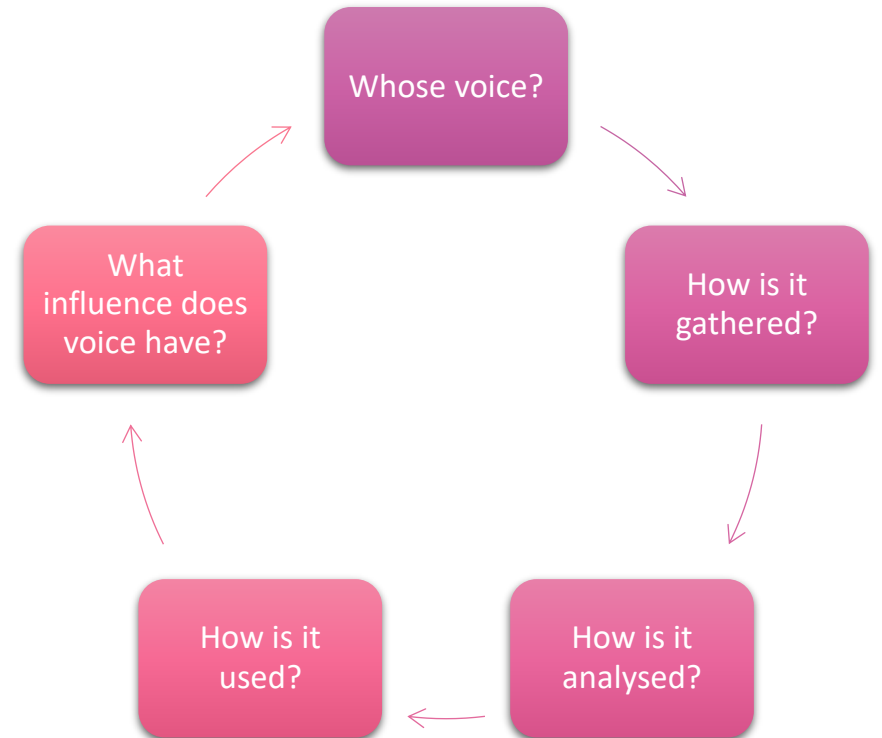(heard during CIP Project)

- Support direct, real-time feedback, enables two-way communication and engaging features
- May enable wider reach, while 'traditional' approaches may miss the most vulnerable.
- Simplicity, aggregating individuals' voices into streamlined feedback systems
- Can offer language and accessibility support features

Challenges of using apps to gather voice
(heard during CIP Project)

- Digital poverty – access to technology and connectivity, digital literacy
- May feel like 'surveillance'
- Tech not accessible for all – will 'traditional' approaches still be used?

Breakouts

- What are you doing locally (or aspiring to do) to incorporate voice into system design?
  - What was the activity/process you implemented?
  - What was the end result?
  - What challenges hindered the process? What enablers supported it?

Whose voice?

How is it gathered?

How is it analysed?

How is it used?

What influence does voice have?

Web resource - Embedding voice in system transformation: Practical approaches for Families First and beyond

Overview
- Why voice matters in transformation

Approach
- Framework for ethical and effective information use

Practical examples
- Integrating voice into systems design
- Examples of what's happening locally

Resources
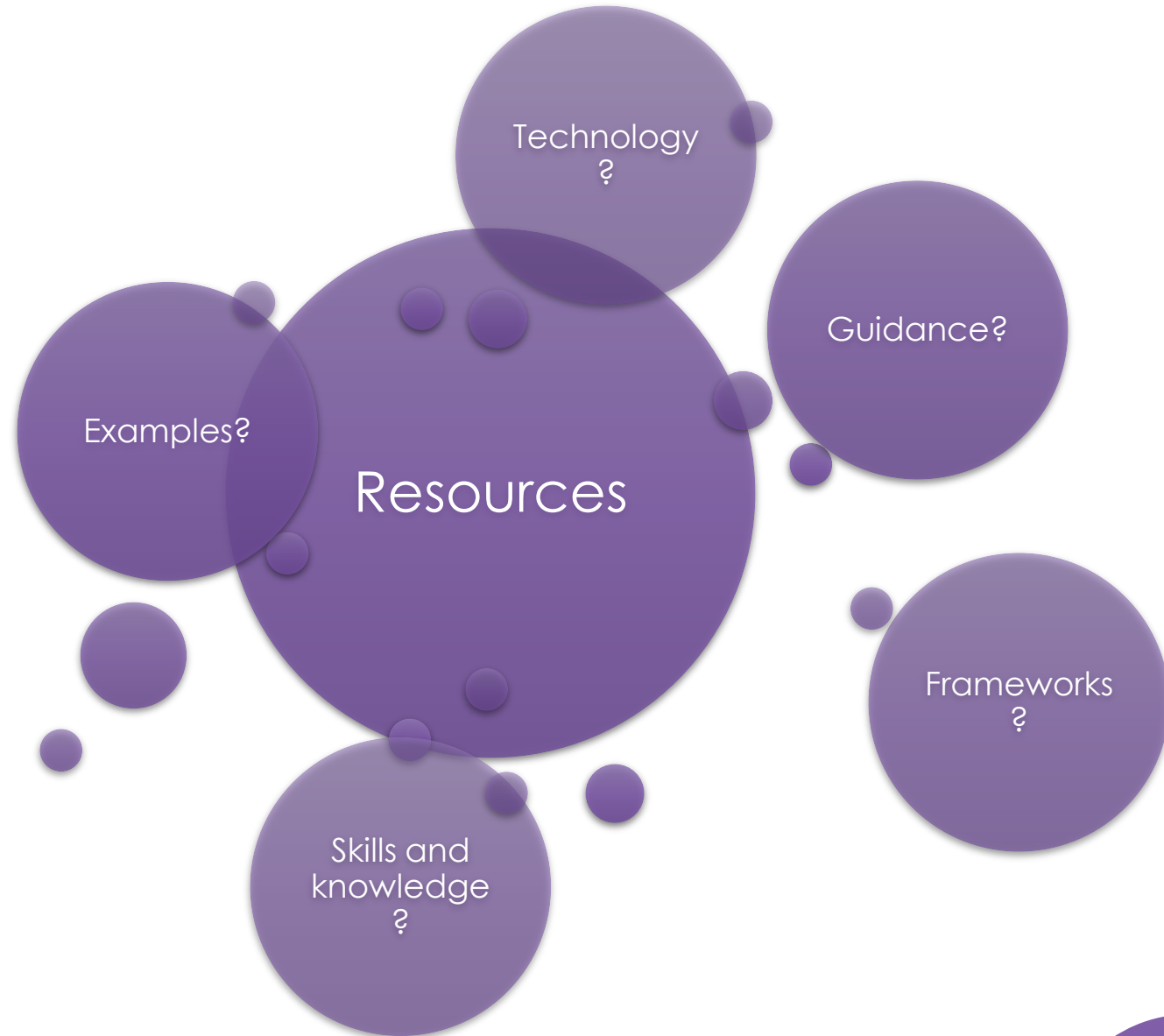- We will develop resources to support your journey – tell us what you need!

Share
- Share your own examples and learn from each other

Embedding voice in system transformation: practical approaches for Families First and beyond | Research in Practice

Plenary

What resources would help?

Technology?

Guidance?

Examples?

Resources

Frameworks?

Skills and knowledge?

Call to action!

☐ Check out the web resource!
  ✓ Share your examples via the link
  ✓ Let us know what resources will help
  ✓ We will build it over time

☐ **Help us improve – <u>Click here to complete the survey here</u>**

Thank you for your participation!