

# **Engaging Younger People in our Decision Making Processes**

**A Task and Finish Group report for the Overview and Scrutiny  
Committee**

March 2009

## **Members of the Task and Finish Group**

Councillor Mike Britland (Chairman)  
Councillor Anne Blacklock  
Councillor Bill Gifford  
Councillor Jane Knight  
Councillor Clare Sawdon

## **Acknowledgements**

The Task and Finish Group would like to thank the following for providing information and evidence to the Group either in person or in written form:

Ben Wesson - Member of the National Youth Parliament for Warwickshire (MYP)  
Aron Truss - Lead Participation Youth Worker, Warwickshire County Council  
Thato Malebye - North Leamington School  
Edward Holden - North Leamington School  
Peter Dixon - Committee Services Officer, Warwick District Council  
Victoria Cook - Improvement Officer, Warwick District Council  
Councillor Mrs Bunker - Portfolio Holder for Young People, Warwick District Council  
Berni Allen - Policy and Projects Officer, Warwick District Council

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### 1.01 Executive Summary

- 1.1 On 23 April 2008 a petition was presented to the Executive by Councillor Britland on behalf of Ben Wesson, Member of the National Youth Parliament for Warwickshire (MYP). The petition stated “We the undersigned, hereby call upon Warwick District Council to conduct a review on how it engages with young people on its day to day proceedings”. The petition was signed by 168 people.
- 1.2 The Executive referred the petition to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, who appointed a Task and Finish Group to consider “engaging younger people in our decision making processes”. A copy of the scoping document is attached at Appendix A.
- 1.3 Warwick District Council has a duty to engage with the community and increased engagement with younger people links to a number of strands of the corporate strategy:
  - To understand and support the differing needs of our communities focussing support where it is most needed
  - To increase involvement by younger people
  - To use best practice to improve service delivery
- 1.4 At an early stage in the review the Task and Finish Group established that work was already being undertaken both at County and District level to improve engagement with younger people. The Group therefore undertook to establish what was being done already before looking at the way forward.
- 1.5 The Group consulted with Warwickshire County Council, the MYP for Warwick, young people from North Leamington School, the District Council’s Portfolio Holder for young people and District Council officers.

## 1.6 The review established that:

- Currently work to engage with young people is underdeveloped.
- Young people, like many adults, are often ignorant of politics and democracy, having only a limited understanding of the purpose and function of Councils, and little or no knowledge of how to engage with local authorities.
- The foundations for joint working with Warwickshire County Council have been laid to provide youth forums through which the Council can engage. 7 Community Youth Forums in the Warwick District were launched on 6 December 2008.
- Further work is being undertaken by Warwick District Council to work towards 'Hear by Right', which is a tried and tested standards framework for organisations across the statutory and voluntary sectors to assess and improve practice and policy on the active involvement of children and young people. It uses measurable standards to map the current level of young people's participation across a wide range of service providers and then strategically develop an action plan to further this. (More information on Hear by right can be found at <http://hbr.nya.org.uk/>)

## 2.01 Methodology

### 2.1 The Task and Finish Group met on 4 occasions:

10 September 2008

22 October 2008

27 November 2008

27 January 2009

2.2 At its first meeting, the group appointed a chairman, reviewed the contents of the scoping document, established a schedule of priorities and received a report from officers on work already being undertaken by the Council. Officers talked about Hear by Right, defined as "a tried and tested standards framework for organisations to assess and improve practice and policy on the active involvement of children and young people". Key service areas had been identified for review using the Hear by Right standard. The group also determined their target age group as children between the ages of 11 and 18 ("up to their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday"), subject to this encompassing all petitioners.

2.3 A second meeting was attended by Councillor Mrs Bunker (Portfolio Holder for Young People), Aron Truss (Lead Participation Youth Worker, Warwick Youth & Community Service), Ben Wesson (Member of the National Youth Parliament for Warwickshire) and Edward Holden and Thato Malebye, students from North Leamington School. This provided an opportunity for the various parties to express

views, make suggestions and question each other. Ben Wesson also gave a presentation on engagement.

- 2.4 The group's third meeting was again attended by Aron Truss, Ben Wesson and Thato Malebye. Aron reported on work being led by the County Council. The group deliberated over suggestions made to date and the potential impact of proposals on the parties involved and on the workings of the District Council. Subsequent to the meeting Aron provided further written evidence and updates on issues raised.
- 2.5 The group met a fourth time to discuss its findings and conclusions and to formulate recommendations.

### **3.01 Evidence, Observations and Research**

- 3.1 A presentation by the MYP defined engagement as the 'process of attracting or involving young people in the decision making process'. He presented figures from a 2007/08 survey of 9,200 young people, which found that nationally over a third of young people felt politics didn't affect them, 60% were not sure whether they had ever received any teaching about politics and 70% did not think local councils engaged with them. A survey of over 80 young people at North Leamington School found that three quarters of students were unsure whether Councils listen to them. The presentation concluded that all young people should be given the opportunity to learn about and be actively involved in politics and democracy, that it should be placed on the school curriculum and be available as a GCSE subject option.
- 3.2 Suggestions put to the Task and Finish Group by witnesses included:
  - Targeting young people at an early age, such as academic years 7 & 8, in order to educate them and encourage interest in local democracy. Introduce regular communication from then on to keep them informed of and involved in local developments.
  - Having a Council representative available at schools on a regular basis who young people can talk through issues and concerns with.
  - An elected member should be identified to act as link between each Community and Youth Forum
  - An area of the Council's website tailored specifically for young people, including information on work being undertaken to engage young people, developments of interest to young people, a discussion forum, the facility for submitting thoughts and questions and possibly further details about 'Hear by Right'. Young people could be involved in designing this area of the website.
  - Targeting specific functions of the Council which are likely to be of interest to young people.

- 3.3 Warwickshire County Council was already leading an initiative to improve engagement of young people, and formally launched 7 Community Youth Forums in the Warwick District at an event on 6 December 2008. Mirroring the structure of 7 'adult' community forums, the Community Youth Forums broadly cover the following areas:
- Kenilworth
  - Leamington North
  - Leamington South
  - Rural East
  - Rural West
  - Warwick
  - Whitnash
- 3.4 Forums are free to organise themselves as they see fit, giving greater flexibility to the young people involved. Meetings will be held in youth centres and a 'detached worker' will attend each gathering in order to assist in maintaining good communication throughout the network. It has been suggested that each Forum should meet a minimum of 4 times a year, but there is no limit on the maximum number of meetings.
- 3.5 The Warwickshire Youth and Community Service is looking at ways in which to sustain interest in the Youth Forums, including the development of a youth opportunity fund and development grants. A lot of promotional work was done in advance of the December launch. It is recognised that it might be harder to attract young people in rural areas simply because there are less of them.
- 3.6 The Youth and Community Service is also looking at how best to develop a District Youth Council, an idea suggested by the MYP. In broad terms, the idea involves the appointment of "shadow portfolio holders", possibly elected, who could consult Warwick District Council on relevant issues and vice versa. The District Youth Council would function as a conduit for the exchange of information and ideas between young people and the local authority.
- 3.7 Key service areas within the District Council have been identified for review using Hear by Right. The review is due to commence imminently, after which time an action plan would be formulated.
- 3.8 There is a lack of comparative information from other authorities due to youth engagement being a fairly new initiative, which is nevertheless being undertaken by many local authorities throughout the country. The approaches under consideration are as new to other authorities as they are to Warwick District Council.
- 3.9 It was suggested that young people seeking to experience local government first hand might find Parish and Town Councils a good place to start, which are more

informal in nature and which have easier access to funds for projects of interest to young people.

## **4.01 Recommendations**

The Task and Finish Group established that there was a need for Warwick District Council to improve engagement with younger people on its decision making processes and recommends that:

### **Recommendation 1**

While acknowledging that some good work is already being done, there is a need to adopt a consistent approach in order to educate and encourage young people's interest in local governance from an early age. Introduce regular two-way communication between schools and local Councillors. Further work is needed on how this should be done.

### **Recommendation 2**

The Council support the Youth Forums and, in principle, the creation of a District Youth Council (DYC) with the appointment of "shadow portfolio holders", possibly elected. Organisation of the DYC to be determined by the Youth Forums, but its primary function should be to present to the Council any issues of common interest to the Forums, and vice versa. A local Councillor for each ward be designated as named contact for the Youth Forums. Additionally, the District Council should offer practical support to the Forums where possible, such as the provision of meeting rooms for their use.

### **Recommendation 3**

An area of the Council's website be tailored specifically for young people, with input from young people and Youth Forums as to what it should include and how it should look. Suggestions for items for inclusion were: links to Youth Forum websites and blogs; developments of interest to young people, for example, the young people's play strategy; a discussion forum; a facility for the submission of thoughts and questions; details of work being undertaken by the Council involving young people, and; details relating to the aims of and progress made with 'Hear By Right'.

### **Recommendation 4**

Functions of the Council which are of interest to young people should be targeted, in consultation with the Youth Forums and Lead Participation Youth Worker.

### **Recommendation 5**

Look at building on the work of Local Democracy Week and committing a small budget to it to ensure events run throughout the year, with a showpiece event in Local Democracy Week.

### **Recommendation 6**

Request that Warwick District Council keep the District Council informed of activities relevant to us where young people are being actively engaged. (Encourage all authorities - parishes, etc. - to communicate about their young people's activities. Warwick Community Forum should adopt a thematic approach which will target Young People. Community Forum should be a focus bringing together adult and young people's issues.)

### **Recommendation 7**

A standing 'Youth Forum' item should be included on Council meeting agendas, providing opportunity for dialogue with Youth Forums and giving them an opportunity to pass on reports, comments or minutes of their meetings. As a general rule, more efforts should be made to involve young people in the scrutiny process.

### **Recommendation 8**

Aron Truss be asked to give a presentation to the Council detailing how youth forums are developing.

### **Recommendation 9**

Steps should be taken to ensure that the Play Working Group actively engages with children and young people.

## **5.01 Monitoring Arrangements**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee should establish monitoring arrangements to ensure that implementation of the recommendations is carried out. This should be done by way of a feedback report in to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee in September 2009 by Berni Allen - Policy and Projects Officer, Warwick District Council.

## **6.01 Appendices**

Appendix 1 - Scoping document

Appendix 2 - Top Tips on consulting with VOX (County Youth Forum) – guidance note produced by VOX



**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

<b>Task and Finish Group Title</b>	<b>Engaging Younger People in our Decision Making Processes</b>
Membership of Working Group:	Cllrs Britland, Gifford, Blacklock, Knight and Sawdon
Area for Investigation: (Directorate and Service Area)	Potential for review to touch on the work of all Directorates
Key Officer Contacts:	Bernadette Allen
Scoping form completed by:	Cllr Mike Britland
Scrutiny requested by:	Executive / Cllr Mike Britland
<b>Criteria for inclusion in work programme</b>	(If yes please provide details)
Customer Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes – Petition presented to the Executive 23/04/08 by Cllr Britland on behalf of Ben Wesson, MYP stated “We the undersigned, hereby call upon Warwick District Council to conduct a review on how it engages with young people on its day to day proceedings”. The petition was signed by 168 people.</li> </ul>
Poor performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes – Although there are no performance measures relating to this area of work, the submission of a petition and the referral of said petition by the Executive to scrutiny suggests that we are not performing in this area.</li> </ul>
Area requiring policy development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes – WDC has a duty to engage citizens in the decision making process.</li> </ul>
Value for Money Concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No</li> </ul>
Emerging issues; Executive Referral, CAA etc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes – The issue has been referred by the Executive.</li> <li>• Engagement with the community in the decision making process is an element of CAA on which we will be assessed.</li> </ul>
Long term financial benefit anticipated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No</li> </ul>
Corporate priority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes – The work relates to a number of Corporate Strategy priorities               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ To understand and support the differing needs of our communities focussing support where it is most needed</li> <li>○ To increase involvement by younger people</li> <li>○ To use best practice to improve service delivery</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<p>Summary of overall anticipated benefits and intended outcomes</p> <p><i>[Give a brief description of what we hope undertaking the review will achieve e.g. Improved performance, amended policy, efficiencies or increased footfall]</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To improve our levels of engagement with our communities.</li> <li>• The development of an effective youth engagement process. The process is to ensure we create a process that meets the needs to young people, based on the feedback they give.</li> <li>• This will contribute towards the work being undertaken as part of the Hear by Right standard.</li> </ul>
<p>Indicators of success</p> <p><i>[Include details of desired indicators of success and how these can be measured]</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased engagement and participation of younger people in the decision making process.</li> </ul>
<b>Policy Context</b>	
National or Regional Policy Implications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Duty to Involve – Communities of Interest</li> </ul>
Impact on local people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community engagement strategy (to be written)</li> </ul>
<b>Scope</b>	
<p>In Scope</p> <p><i>[Define what the scope of review]</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our current consultation procedures and structures.</li> <li>• Possible future mechanisms for enhancing engagement.</li> <li>• Need to agree a definition of ‘young person’ to ensure age groups are defined</li> </ul>
<p>Excluded from Scope</p> <p><i>[Define the exclusions from the scope of the review]</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engagement with young people on issues purely relating to the work of the County Council or other partner organisations.</li> <li>• The group is not carrying out the engagement role.</li> </ul>
<b>Council and Partner Involvement</b>	
<p>Who would need to be involved from the Council?</p> <p>Which of our partners, stakeholders and Members of the community should we discuss this with?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Younger people</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Partners <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Town and parish councils</li> <li>○ County Council to find out about existing engagement routes</li> </ul> </li> <li>• WDC Involvement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Policy and Performance re: current consultation procedures</li> <li>○ Service areas with younger people as a key element of their customer base; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Leisure</li> <li>▪ Housing</li> <li>▪ Community safety</li> <li>▪ Licensing</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Input from all service areas</li> </ul>
<b>Review Resources</b>	
<p>Evidence</p> <p><i>[Background Information and documents to look at]</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Best practice from other Authorities</li> <li>• Hear By Right, as a reference source for an engagement framework</li> <li>• Engagement, participation and involvement strategy</li> </ul>
<p>Witnesses</p> <p><i>[Who to see and when]</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Petitioners</li> <li>• School council members</li> <li>• Youth groups</li> <li>• Town and parish councils</li> <li>• County Council</li> </ul>
<p>Site visits</p> <p><i>[Details of site visits and when they will be held if appropriate]</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Schools</li> <li>• Youth Centres</li> <li>• Where ever young people meet</li> </ul>
<p>Consultation</p> <p><i>[Is there any consultation which needs to be undertaken to feed into the review]</i></p> <p><i>[consult with CMT on draft outcomes for any issues they may have]</i></p> <p><i>[Do findings need to be published for consultation before making final recommendations?]</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young people</li> <li>• Community Partnership Team</li> <li>• CMT</li> </ul>
Expert Advice	N/A
<b>Dangers/ Barriers/Risks</b>	
<p>What are the risks to the review?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The group start to try and do the engagement work rather than filling the void and solving the issue in the long term</li> <li>• There are no ideas brought to the table as to how engagement can be improved</li> <li>• Young people do not want to engage with WDC</li> <li>• The review does not engage with a wide range of young people and is therefore not representative, which impacts on the effectiveness of the outcomes</li> <li>• The Executive do not approve recommendations</li> <li>• The outcomes duplicate work being undertaken by our partners</li> </ul>
<b>Timescales</b>	
Anticipated Review Start Date	July 2008
Anticipated Reporting Date	February 2009
Frequency of Meetings	
Date to evaluate impact	

### Top 10 Tips on Consulting VOX (The Warwickshire Youth Council)

#### **1. Keep The Information Simple & Brief:**

Whilst we should be able to understand the information given to us, we do not always know the technical terms and acronyms within the Council structure, nor are we able to take in mass volumes of information at once.

Therefore information presented to us would be best done in a way that is simple and brief, allowing us to ask further questions to gain an understanding.

Breaking the information down into bullet points or diagrams would be very helpful to us.

#### **2. Presentation Of Information:**

Presenting the information in a way that can be easily read will allow us to absorb the information more effectively, allowing us to understand the information, giving you more reliable feedback from us.

Combined with this; try and cut down paper work. The paper work is often irrelevant to the point in question – handing out entire documents when only 1 or 2 pages are of relevance to your cause or to us in general.

#### **3. Young People Relevant:**

If you must bring leaflets and information in, make them relevant to “young people” and the issue that you want us to comment upon...make that relevant to “young people” too!

#### **4. Involve The Group & Make It Fun:**

Don't be afraid to get us involved in discussions with you by lightening the mood. We, as a group of young people, take more interest and as such will comment more freely if you have given some thought about creative ways in which you can get us to understand your purpose for coming to our meeting.

#### **5. Know What You Want:**

Make sure you know what you want from us. Too many times, adults have come in, given short inputs and then asked our opinions. It would be helpful if you could be more specific if you have a clear idea of what you want from a meeting with us. Try and avoid raising

very general broad points in our experience this does not really lead to any clear way forward.

Try and be clear about what it is that you are trying to do, how and why you want us to comment on it.

## **6. Consult Us:**

Yes we can comment on posters, logos, designs, take part in interviews, etc. But we would like to be involved in meatier challenging pieces of work as well. We have got a good track record of being involved in lengthy complicated bits of work

## **7. Target Audience**

If the issue you're looking at is something like bullying, sexual health, environment, etc...that affects us all then do contact us. If the issue is something more specialist then we may not be the relevant young people to consult. We will certainly try to point you in the right direction if this is the case

## **8. Adequate Notice & Time To Respond**

Sometimes we are given a lot of information and expected to give comments there and then. This is not always possible. If we are contacted at the last minute then expect a last minute response from us. It would be better if you can give us an opportunity to absorb and understand before we are asked to comment.

## **9. Respect Our Views & Listen To Us**

We will be honest with you on what we think and we hope that you take on board our opinions. A good way to show that you are listening to us is to come back and tell us what you did as a result of meeting with us. More often than not when adults have consulted us we don't hear from them again.

## **10. Involve Us From The Start**

If we are involved from the start it makes us more eager to see something through to the end.