

WARDS AFFECTED: ALL	ITEM No.
REPORT OF: Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission – Participation Working Group CONTACT OFFICERS: Leigh Webb – Democratic Services Officer Cath Fernley – Children/Young Peoples Strategy Officer	23 June 2009
TITLE: PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE	

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Members of the Commission of the findings and recommendations of the Participation Working Group.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 The Commission are asked to consider the recommendations of the Working Group set out in 6.0 of the report

3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 At its meeting on 30 June 2008, the Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission agreed that the Participation Working Group continue its review looking at the role of young people in the decision making processes of the Council
- 3.2 The Membership of the Group for 2008/2009 comprised of Councillor S Wright (Chair), Councillor Ahmed, Councillor Byrne, Councillor Davison and Co-opted Members Gill Stainthorpe and Margaret Wild.
- 3.3 At an early meeting of the Group, discussions took place to widen the existing remit of the review, resulting in the identification of the following areas for further and future investigation:

- Development of processes to engage with vulnerable and hard to reach young people (including those with learning disabilities and looked after children)
- Identification of an inclusive system to process the views of young people in order to influence policy and service planning
- Examination of democratic structure and participation opportunities with a view to making young people more aware of existing provision

3.4 A Scrutiny Project Plan was drawn up to provide a framework for the Review and is attached at Appendix 1

4.0 METHODOLOGY

4.1 The Group have used a variety of methods to gather information as part of the Review process including: interviews with officers from the Youth Service, Local Area Partnerships and Children's Services. The Chair of the Group, Councillor Steven Wright, has personally attended a Youth Cabinet meeting which subsequently resulted in a question and answer session with young people being arranged at the January 2009 meeting of the Participation Working Group.

5.0 PROGRESS

5.1 As part of the review the Group have examined Bury's current Participation Strategy and looked at the Authority's progress in meeting the National Hear By Right Standards. The Hear By Right standards have been produced to support agencies in the process of engaging and consulting with children and young people. The standards aim to ensure that their participation in decision making is well planned, appropriately resourced and effectively delivered and produce meaningful outcomes for children and young people.

5.2.1 Engaging with young people as part of the review was identified at the outset as an essential means of informing the review. A question and answer session was arranged with representatives from the Youth Cabinet, resulting in 12 young people attending the meeting of the Working Group on 19 January 2009. The following summary extract from the minutes of the meeting highlights a number of constructive suggestions and comments which contributed to a very positive exercise:

The Chair, Councillor Wright, welcomed the young people and invited questions from Members of the Working Group and the following issues were raised:

<p>∇ <i>Councillor Davison enquired about the way youth cabinet influences the decision making process of the Council, and how could this be improved ?</i></p>
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∇ *Youth Cabinet members outlined the make up of the Committee and explained that it was the main forum that young people could express their views to Councillors. During further discussion of the role of Youth Cabinet, it was highlighted that there was no formal mechanism for feeding into the decision making process of the Council. It was suggested that the Minutes of the Youth Cabinet should be submitted to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission and consideration given to Co-opting a Youth Cabinet representative onto the Commission.*

∇ *With regard to co-opting a young person onto the main scrutiny commission, it was accepted that some flexibility in terms of agenda timings and themes may be required to encourage the active participation of young people in the scrutiny process.*

∇ *A number of young people expressed concern and frustration in relation to the bureaucracy of the decision making process and the time taken for the views of young people to be acted on.*

∇ *It was highlighted that the wants of young people change and expressed concern over the length of time take to develop facilities. Councillor Byrne commented that flexible leisure facilities should be provided that can adapt to the changing needs of young people.*

∇ *In response to a question concerning the involvement of young people on the Local Area Partnerships (LAPs) it was highlighted that most agenda items are not relevant to young people, resulting in boredom and them not feeling part of the process.*

∇ *During discussion of role of School Councils in the Borough, Councillor Davison commented on the need for them to be more involved and feed into the LAPs and Youth Action Groups.*

∇ *A number of young people highlighted that engaging with young people was a two way process and that efforts should be made by decision makers to actively seek the views of young people. The young people present at the meeting suggested that all Councillors should be encouraged to visit School Councils and Youth Cabinet.*

∇ *The young people stressed the importance of raising awareness with regard to the Youth Cabinet and Youth Action Groups to encourage new members to get involved.*

∇ *Councillors enquired whether the Council had an appointed Youth Champion to raise the profile of issues affecting young People ?*

∇ ***Members discussed the associated costs, in terms of both time and money, for young people attending meetings of various groups. Members felt that where possible any barriers to participation should be removed, and suggested exploring the provision of travel expenses for young people.***

∇ ***With regard to participation, a number of young people highlighted the importance of engaging through a wide range of communication methods including social networking sites. The group were informed about the existence of a Youth Parliament Group on Facebook.***

∇ ***Members of the Group accepted the need explore all communication methods relevant to young people, both formal and informal, to reach out and encourage active participation.***

The Chair, Councillor Wright, thanked all the young people for attending and commented on how useful the exercise had been for Councillors and the work of this Group.

5.2.2 Throughout the review, the Working Group has recognised the critical role of the Youth Service in terms of encouraging the active participation and input of young people with regard to the services provided. Towards the completion of the review proposals to reduce the funding to the Youth Service were approved in the Council's Budget for 2009/2010. It has been reported that a range of options will be considered to manage the reductions which will include inviting third sector (voluntary) organisations to run some youth services. Members of the Group stressed the importance of ensuring that frontline services to young people are not curtailed or shut as a result of the budget reduction and that proposals for the future delivery of services are subject to scrutiny and detailed consultations with young people.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 In framing its recommendations, the Working Group have looked to acknowledge and strengthen the positive work currently undertaken in Bury in terms of participation opportunities for young people. The Group have recognised the value of engaging with young people to inform policies and service delivery and have looked at means of increasing involvement in the decision making processes of the Council in an inclusive and relevant way. The Children and Young People's Scrutiny Commission are asked to consider the following recommendations of the Participation Working Group:

- (i) That the Council be requested to appoint a Youth Champion in order to raise the profile of issues affecting all young people in the Borough

- (ii) That the Council be requested to re-affirm its commitment to UN Convention Article 12, emphasising the need for participation and for children to have a voice.
- (iii) That an audit be conducted of current participation and involvement opportunities across the statutory and voluntary sector and recognise existing good practice.
- (iv) That an annual update of progress against Hear By Right standards to be submitted to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission.
- (v) That the Youth Cabinet be invited to have a co-opted place on the Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission
- (vi) That the Minutes of the Youth Cabinet to be made available to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission as a standard for information item on each agenda.
- (vii) That Councillors on School Governing bodies be encouraged to strengthen links with school councils to allow for issues to be fed into the Local Authority decision making process.
- (viii) That the increased use of a range of communications methods to engage with young people including the use of social networking sites and mobile communications be explored and developed
- (ix) That youth forums and the Youth Cabinet look to increase the involvement of young people with learning disabilities.
- (x) That the issue of expenses for young people attending formal meetings be examined with a view to making provision for reimbursement.
- (xi) That the Scrutiny Management Committee be requested to examine the need to develop formal reporting mechanisms for information/decisions taken through Team Bury/Local Area Partnerships/ Children's Trust.
- (xii) That the Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission examine proposals for the future management of youth services in the Borough, in light of the reduction in funding approved in the Council's 2009/2010 budget.
- (xiii) That the Chair of the Participation Working Group present the findings of the final report of the Youth Cabinet for comment.
- (xiv) That, subject to approval, progress on the implementation of the recommendations be reported to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission in 6 months time.

7.0 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 During the current year, the Working Group have made positive progress in looking at how young people are consulted and engaged within the decision making process and in the delivery of local services. There is a clear recognition that children and young people have valuable and interesting opinions which can improve the delivery of services and enhance local democracy.
- 7.2 As Chair of the Sub Group, I would like to take the opportunity to record my thanks to all Members of the Group, Officers and young people that have contributed to the review during the year. Looking forward, a report of this Working Group will be submitted to the full Commission early in the new Municipal year, setting out final recommendations which will look to recognise and build on the measures in place to listen and respond to the views of children and young people.

Councillor S Wright
Chair, Participation Working Group

List of background papers other than published works or those disclosing exempt or confidential information.

Participation Working Group - Minutes
Bury Participation Strategy for Children and Young People 2007/10
Hear By Rights – National Standards

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APPENDIX 1

Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission Participation Working Group

PROJECT PLAN 2008-2009

<u>Title</u>		Participation of Children and Young People	
<u>Members Involved</u>		Councillors: S Wright, Ahmed, Byrne and Davison Co-opted Members: Gill Stainthorpe and Margaret Wild	
<u>Objectives</u>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To develop processes to engage with vulnerable and hard to reach young people (including those with learning disabilities and looked after children) • Identify an inclusive system to process the views of young people in order to influence policy and service planning • To examine democratic structures/ participation opportunities with a view to making young people more aware of existing provision. 	
<u>Methodology</u>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine current provision • Examine current Democratic Structure, role of Youth Cabinet, Children's Trust Board, Local Area Partnerships, Scrutiny and the involvement of marginalised individuals and Groups • Interview Council staff and representatives from the voluntary sector / young people • Attend meeting of the Council's Youth Cabinet 	
<u>Initial list of interviewees</u>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cath Fernley • Youth Cabinet representatives • LAP Chairs 	
<u>Outcome</u>		A report to Children and Young People Communities Scrutiny Commission setting out recommendations in relation to the objectives of the Review.	
<u>Projected start date</u>	Sept 2008	<u>Projected completion date/Interim report</u>	March 2009

