
A STRATEGY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION IN DARLINGTON

Responsible Cabinet Member(s) - Councillor Chris McEwan, Children's Services Portfolio

Responsible Director(s) - Cliff Brown, Director of Community Services

Purpose of Report

1. Through the initial development of the Youth Strategy and latterly the Children and Young People's Plan, a collation and analysis of consultative events with young people over the last 4 years was undertaken. It emerged that while there had been a large number of consultative exercises (55), there was little evidence of the views of young people directly impacting on service provision or addressing the key issues for young people in Darlington. Further, there is evidence of a growing distrust and fatigue amongst young people.
2. In response to this, the Youth Service has been developing a Youth Participation Strategy since January with the intent of creating a rationale, structure and mechanisms for the more meaningful involvement and participation of young people.

Background

3. There are a range and number of differing policy drivers to support and develop the involvement and participation of young people in decision-making, at an individual and organisational level. In addition to the over-arching UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (and in particular Article 12), much Government guidance and legislation now articulates the case for, and desire to see, the involvement of young people running throughout planning and provision of services.
4. The most recent Government guidance on local authority youth services, Youth Matters: Next Steps (March 2006) reinforces this with a constant message that the Government wants to see young people actively involved in their communities, influencing decision-making and democratic processes and leading action to change communities for the better.
5. The Council has responded positively to this national and local context. The Local Area Agreement acknowledges the unbalanced focus on consultation with a drive to create mechanisms for young people's active involvement and participation in decision-making. It balances involvement in decision-making with a wider engagement of young people in activities and opportunities to promote their active citizenship and contribute to wider goals of community cohesion and integration.

6. The Children and Young People's Plan reiterates and shares the priorities of the LAA and includes the priority action of 'develop a framework for engagement and involvement to include a range of formal and informal engagement mechanisms to enable the voice of young people to be articulated at the key over-arching decision-making bodies within the borough' (p.40). Additionally the CYPP has attempted to translate theory into practice by building in consultation and involvement to the development of the plan, commencing with the Darlington Assembly seminar (June 2005) and culminating in an event with young people in December 2005 to identify the top local priorities, from a young person's perspective, for development within the plan. Additionally group of young people assisted in the planning, design and delivery of this event.

Youth Participation Strategy

7. The Youth Participation Strategy is attached at **Appendix 1**. It essentially promotes a three-strand approach.

Strand 1 – Service Specific

Individual departments, services, agencies and providers sign up to the model of young people's participation to ensure that involvement permeates all aspects of that service. There is a recognition that not everyone will be starting from the same point.

Strand 2 – Borough Wide (Young People)

The creation of mechanisms and a body which means that the voice of young people can be articulated and that it is present at the key over-arching decision-making bodies within the Borough.

Strand 3 – Inter-Agency Support

Representatives from key delivery agencies across the Borough come together to sign up to the model of youth participation and to develop an action plan to facilitate this. The intent is to create a consistent and cohesive approach across all services to young people.

8. Within strand 2 three tiers are proposed. At tier 1, mechanisms are created where any young person at any time can articulate opinions, ideas and suggestions. At tier 2, we continue to build on existing good practice supporting the work of young people who are already actively involved (for example within school councils, within Connexions, health etc). At tier 3, a core group of young people come together (Voice and Action Group) who act as a vocal point for the views and ideas of young people and who can work alongside decision-making forums (for example, elected members, Local Strategic Partnership, Children and Young Peoples Strategic Partnership).
9. The structures and mechanisms proposed are in line with the emerging corporate Community Engagement Strategy and in particular the four key strands of information sharing, consultation, capacity building and full empowerment. This Youth Participation Strategy will seek to support and complement the Community Engagement Strategy whilst at the same time allowing for a specific focus on and approach to young people.

10. A number of performance targets and anticipated outcomes have been identified. Crucially these include adoption across the Borough of the National Youth Agency/Local Government Association standard 'Hear By Right' and the development of measures so that the participation of young people and impact on the design and development of services can be evidenced.
11. Recent delivery of programmes and projects with young people suggests that the strategy as outlined has potential for success. The draft strategy has been well received at information and consultation sessions with groups of young people. In elections to the UK Youth Parliament 5 candidates stood for election and 2580 (27.3%) of the electorate voted. In excess of 60 young people attended the ATOM event at the 96.9 TFM Arena to input ideas and sign up to be involved in developing activity and provision within Eastbourne, Bank Top, Lingfield and Lascelles wards.

Outcome of Consultation

12. The draft Strategy has been shared with key personnel within the Council (Community Services, Children's Services, Chief Executive's Department – Policy Unit) and feedback and comments have helped to shape and refine the strategy, keeping it in line with the LAA and Children and Young People's Plan. Youth Service staff are now in the process of taking the strategy to young people and partner groups/organisations.
13. The Strategy has developed as a direct result of analysis of previous consultation with young people and of the need to develop a more consistent and coherent approach to young people's participation.

Legal Implications

14. This report has been considered by the Legal Services Manager for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Legal Services Manager considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998

15. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect.

Council Policy Framework

16. The issues contained within this report are required to be considered by Council.

Conclusion

17. There has been a recent history of regular consultation with young people with less evidence of how and where resultant outcomes have impacted on the planning, design or

delivery of services.

18. The Council has, through the LAA and CYPP, articulated a desire to move to more meaningful participation and involvement of young people in decision-making processes.
19. A draft Youth Participation Strategy to begin to advance and develop this desire has been developed and seeks to create a firm foundation on which to build.

Recommendation

20. It is recommended that Members endorse it as a model for further consultation and implementation across the Borough.

Reasons

21. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons: -
 - (a) There has been limited evidence of young people's views (through consultation exercises) having a direct impact on service provision.
 - (b) The Youth Participation Strategy offers the opportunity to have a coherent and consistent approach to young people's participation in decision-making.
 - (c) The Strategy offers the opportunity for the Council to be leading on a Borough-wide initiative with/for young people.
 - (d) The Youth Participation Strategy will be consistent with and complementary to the emerging corporate Community Engagement Strategy.

Cliff Brown
Director of Community Services

Background Papers

The are no background papers pertinent to this report.

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