

Subject:

Youth Engagement and Local Democracy

Date:

10th October 2013

To:

Ward Members Working Group

Report by:

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Communities**

Matter for discussion

At its last meeting, the Ward Members Working Group requested further examples of national good practice in youth engagement and local democracy.

The Local Government Association maintains a knowledge hub as an opportunity to share good practice across the functions of local government. Dating back to 2007 GYBC contributed to these hubs as part of its role as an “Empowering Authority”. Through this network there were a number of examples of other authorities undertaking positive engagement activities particularly with young people. Examples included the London Borough of Lewisham, with the first elected Youth Mayor and Devon’s Young Commissioners programme.

A publication produced by the LGA this year highlighted the opportunity to engage young people in Scrutiny, emphasising the importance of a youth perspective in such debates.

http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=b1f405e8-53f2-482e-ab7b-312dfdc98f6e&groupId=10180

At a district level a number of local councils also maintain youth councils and youth forums some to varying degrees of effectiveness.

In Norfolk, the establishment of Youth Advisory Boards in each district has created an opportunity to focus on the needs and aspirations of young people, with a delegated budget directed by young people themselves. In Great Yarmouth the Youth Advisory Board has been particularly successful, commissioning a range of youth projects and establishing 4 Youth Action Groups in recognition of the geographical spread of young people across the borough. Each Youth Action Group is led by young people and supported by a Youth Worker from MAP (the commissioned provider on behalf of Norfolk County Council).

The Youth Advisory Board model provides a number of opportunities for GYBC.

- The success of the Cabinet in Schools programme has highlighted the opportunity to engage young people in democratic debate, utilising the technology and multimedia available in the Council Chamber. There is certainly an appetite from Youth Action Groups to host a larger youth debate around “real issues” for young people in the borough.
- There is also an opportunity to establish a formal relationship between council decision-making processes and the Youth Action Groups, to maintain a direct link between young people and local democratic structures. A number of national case studies are available to illustrate this.
- Individual ward members may wish to engage directly with Youth Action Groups or School Councils to canvass the views of children and young people. Ward members may also wish to engage directly with young people through outreach and detached youth work. Existing Youth and Community Workers may be able to assist with this.

Experience of working with young people demonstrates that such engagement needs to be relevant, meaningful and pitched at the right level and delivered in the right way, delivering concrete results. Such an approach will enthuse young people to become the next generation of councilors and elected members.