

YOUTH FORUM WORKING GROUP
(Report of the Working Group)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Panel, at its meeting on 5th June 2007, established a Working Group to consider a proposal to establish a District Youth Forum. Councillors E R Butler, Mrs K E Cooper, P J Downes, Mrs P A Jordan and J S Watt were appointed to the Working Group. This report contains the Working Group's recommendations on the proposal and on a number of related matters.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 During the last review of the Constitution Councillor P J Downes suggested the Council should establish a District youth forum. The Corporate Governance Panel, as the body responsible for overseeing the Council's constitutional arrangements and advising the Council of any changes, decided to request the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) to investigate the practical and financial implications of proposal and to report back.
- 2.2 The Working Group has held two meetings. Councillors Mrs K E Cooper, P J Downes, Mrs P A Jordan and J S Watt were present at the first meeting on 30th August 2007. The second meeting on 11th October was attended by Councillors Mrs K E Cooper, P J Downes, Mrs P A Jordan.

3. STUDY REMIT

- 3.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Panel, following discussion at it June meeting, gave the Working Group the task of considering and making recommendations on whether the Council should establish a district youth forum. Its purpose would be to bring together representatives of youth councils and youth forums created locally by Town and Parish councils and other youth organisations. It also would encourage Town and Parish Councils to establish their own youth forums to assist young people in becoming involved in civic life. The District Youth Forum would be attended by representatives of Town and Parish forums who would share information and best practice. The Panel further suggested that the youth forum could act as a consultative mechanism on scrutiny issues and might be invited to report quarterly to the Panel, which would give young people a voice within the Council and encourage an interest in local democracy.

2. YOUTH FORUM PURPOSES

- 2.1 On the basis of the study remit, the Working Group established the following potential purposes for a Youth Forum:
1. To ensure the views of young people inform the Council's corporate plans and priorities;
 2. To ensure the views of young people are incorporated into the Council's service planning process;

3. To encourage in young people an interest in and to provide experience of local democracy, and
4. To stimulate Town and Parish Councils to establish youth forums and to spread good practice.

3. STUDY WORK

- 3.1 Having established potential purposes of a youth forum the Working Group decided to discuss with representatives of organisations involved in youth work the extent to which these purposes are already being met. The Working Group agreed on the importance of the purposes but wanted to avoid duplicating existing arrangements in this area. Members, therefore, decided to speak to the District Council's Head of Policy and Strategic Services, Ian Leatherbarrow, and Senior Policy Officer (Young People), Gill Hanby, in the first instance.

4. FINDINGS

- 4.1 The Working Group has discussed with Mr Leatherbarrow and Ms Hanby existing arrangements for involving children and young people in decision-making in Huntingdonshire. The District Council previously has undertaken a three year Young People's Active Involvement project, the outcome of which was reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery and Resources) at its meeting on 4th April 2006. This project, since then, has been rolled out to partner organisations through joint funding from the District and County Councils and Huntingdonshire Regional College.
- 4.2 A Countywide model has been developed for involving children and young people in decisions. A pilot exercise has been carried out using the model as part of the review of the Sustainable Community Strategy. The Working Group has heard evidence that the model has successfully been used to achieve purposes 1 and 2 in section 2 of this report above. Furthermore, efforts are being made to try to encourage partnerships/groups at locality/ward level to develop actions based on work emerging from the Sustainable Community Strategy. The Working Group is of the view that the model for involving children and young people in decisions should be promoted to create greater awareness of it.
- 4.3 A bid is to be made to the national volunteering charity "V" which, if successful, will bring in £300k to the County and of that £100k over three years will be for Huntingdonshire specifically to work with 16-24 year olds. The Working Group has expressed its support for the bid and its intended use.
- 4.4 Investigations are being undertaken into developing a Countywide application to the Local Public Service Agreement Reward Money for funding in the region of £100k over three years for developing strategic work, including how the involvement of children and young people can be embedded into the work of organisations and coordinating/promoting partnership working. The Working Group also has supported this bid. In addition, officers are working with County colleagues to identify sources of funding to help support other areas of work such as that involving other age groups or specific settings.

- 4.5 With regard to the third purpose, the Working Group has been informed that the PARC toolkit is a good starting point for Town and Parish Councils who are considering engaging with young people. A “bitesized” session on this will be held in the New Year. While the toolkit has been demonstrated to be effective in achieving its aims, the Working Group has been made aware that it requires adult input and effort to ensure a succession of young people are involved. The Working Group is of the view that resources should be made available to support Town and Parish Councils’ in engaging young people. Members have suggested that application is made to the Local Public Service Agreement Board for funding for this purpose and that it should be used to provide training for members of Town and Parish Councils on involving young people and to provide “session” workers to support Town and Parish Councils.
- 4.6 Both of the initiatives that are the subject of funding bids could support the development of work with Town and Parish Councils but they are not solely aimed at developing work with them as the PARC project was. Another initiative available to Town and Parish Councils provides training on ‘involving young people’, which includes modular training and suitable for Councilors at all levels.
- 4.7 Funding for this area of work is crucial if the initiatives referred to above are to be developed. Work is being done to attract external funding but this cannot be guaranteed and tends to be time-limited. As a result consideration is being given to the possibility of including young people’s involvement in costings of work plans/action plans as they are developed. This would mean work was more sustainable and ensure it is embedded rather than bolted on.
- 4.8 The Working Group has noted that most schools in the District have school councils although no evidence was presented to indicate how effective these are. Members are satisfied that by this means and through that outlined in the previous paragraph the fourth purpose can be achieved.
- 4.9 In discussing the suggestions that a youth forum could act as a consultative mechanism on scrutiny issues and might be invited to report quarterly to the Panel for Service Delivery, the Working Group has recognised the value of having such input into the Scrutiny process. Members recommend that feedback is provided on the arrangements outlined above on the suggested frequency. Owing to the work that is still required it will not be possible to commence this reporting until 2008.
- 4.10 Given a general lack of awareness of the work that is going on in this field, the Working Group recommends that measures are taken address this situation. Members suggest that articles are placed in Districtwide, Team News and other Council publications on work with children and young people.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The Working Group has considered a proposal to introduce a District Youth Forum. In order to do this a number of criteria have been identified that such a forum might fulfil, which have been set out. On the evidence presented, the Panel notes the arrangements currently

in place and recognises that they might have the potential to meet the criteria in 2.1. Members consider that the level of participation by young people at Town and Parish Council level is not yet sufficiently developed to justify the creation of a District Youth Forum in the format originally envisaged. However, this should remain an aspiration and a long-term target for those engaged in developing youth participation.

- 5.2 The Working Group is, however, of the view that the current arrangements need to be developed and put on a sustainable footing before they can be said adequately to meet the four purposes identified in paragraph 2.1 above. For the justifications given in the preceding paragraphs the Working Group has made a series of recommendations, which are intended to achieve this.

6. RECOMMENDATION

The Working Group

RECOMMEND

- a) that the Corporate Governance Panel notes the work being undertaken to involve young people, is advised not to introduce a Youth Forum at this time but remains open to re-considering this as and when circumstances permit;
- b) that measures are introduced to promote the Countywide model for involving children and young people in decision-making;
- c) that the submission of a bid for funding to “V” for work with 16-24 year olds is supported;
- d) that the bid to the Local Public Service Agreement Board Reward Money for funding for developing strategic work, including how the involvement of children and young people can be embedded into the work of organisations and coordinating/promoting partnership working is supported;
- e) that application is made to the Local Public Service Agreement Board for funding to provide training for members of Town and Parish Councils on involving young people and to provide “session” workers to support Town and Parish Councils
- f) that quarterly reports are submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) on the outcomes of the Council’s engagement work with children and young people; and
- g) that measures are taken to raise awareness of current work in this field including, but not limited to, those referred to in paragraph 4.7 above.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Notes of meetings of the Youth Forum Working Group.

Contact Officer: A Roberts  01480 388009