



London Borough of Hammersmith &
Fulham

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

DATE	TITLE	Wards
7 th December 2011	Engaging with Young People through Overview and Scrutiny	ALL

SYNOPSIS

This report is written by the Children and Young People's Involvement Officer and members of the Borough Youth Forum (BYF). It outlines the potential for the involvement of young people in the Hammersmith and Fulham Overview and Scrutiny committees.

CONTRIBUTORS

Representatives of the Borough Youth Forum and the Children and Young Peoples Involvement Officer.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

It is recommended that:

- i. the Overview and Scrutiny Board note the role that the overview and scrutiny process has had in engaging and involving young people in the local decision making process both in Hammersmith and Fulham and other local authorities and
- ii. consider proposals for how this might be enhanced and embedded into local practice.

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NEXT STEPS

A date to then be agreed for the Borough Youth Forum and witnesses from other boroughs to attend a panel meeting to present the report and to agree actions for the continued involvement of Borough Youth Forum in Overview and Scrutiny and mutual support structures.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Borough Youth Forum has successfully engaged with Members of the Education Select Committee and actions have been agreed for their constructive and ongoing involvement and mutual support. The BYF and the Youth Involvement Officer would like to extend their involvement to Overview and Scrutiny, thus ensuring that the voices of young people are heard at every level of the Council's decision making structures and that young people are not only involved in decisions surrounding 'youth specific' services and issues, but also in those that may indirectly impact upon them as residents.

This paper outlines the benefits of involving young people, examples of how young people can be involved in Overview and Scrutiny, good practice examples from other boroughs and proposals for involving young people in Overview and Scrutiny in Hammersmith and Fulham.

2. What is the Borough Youth Forum?

2.1. The Borough Youth Forum (BYF), the equivalent to Youth Councils in other boroughs, is at the heart of the youth involvement structure in Hammersmith and Fulham. For details of all youth involvement programmes see:

http://theintranet/Departments/Childrens_services/159214_Youth_involvement_intranet.asp

http://www.lbhf.gov.uk/Directory/Education_and_Learning/Extra-curricular_activities/Young_peoples_organised_activities/23130_Young_people.asp

2.2. The BYF is made up of 30 young people who have been elected from schools, colleges, youth projects and services in the borough. Many have been elected by their school councils. They are a 'voice' for young people in the borough and develop different ways to find out the views of young people (including the use of social media, video, and interviewing) and present them to decision makers. They work with the Council and health services to give their opinion on policies, activities and services for young people in the borough, and participate in various projects and consultations, such as attending the borough's Crime Summit to present the views of young people on how crime affects them, inputting into the strategic plan for Children's Services and meeting with Members of the task group for children's oral health to share their experiences of oral health care.

2.3. Once a year, members of the BYF decide whether they wish to stand in the UK Youth Parliament elections to become Member of Youth Parliament (MYP) for Hammersmith and Fulham and represent the borough at a regional and national level. The 2011 elections were held in February in schools and youth projects throughout the borough. Over 2,900 votes were received and

our current Member of Youth Parliament, Chikira Smith-Richards (16) and Deputy Member, Josie Durley (15) were elected. They have since attended various regional meetings, where they are involved in campaigns including the improvement of sex and relationship education and the inclusion of political education into the curriculum and are in the process of producing scrutiny style reports on these issues, which will be presented to Ministers. BYF support the MYP and DMYP by seeking the views of young people on these issues and feeding them back to the MYP and DMYP.

3. Why Involving young people is important

3.1. National Context

Children and young people are integral to every community. They have a right to be heard and taken seriously and to be involved in the decisions that affect them. This is enshrined and/or recommended in a plethora of legislation and guidance: the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989, Human Rights Act, 1991, the Children Act 2004). It is widely accepted that professionals should work with children and young people to develop ways of ensuring that their views are heard and valued and encouraging them to participate in creating, building and improving services to make them more responsive to their needs.¹ Research and experience have shown that children and young people respond better to services and achieve better outcomes if they participate in the decision-making process. This is just one of the many benefits highlighted by researchers, which include:

- More accountable and improved structures policies and decision making, and a strengthening of democratic legitimacy.
- Improved, provision, uptake and cost effectiveness of projects, programs and services.
- Recognition of children and young people as stakeholders (as creators and not just consumers).
- Improved collaboration, respect and communication between young people and professionals.
- Providing a means for under represented groups to be heard.
- Engendering responsibility including increased aspirations, citizenship and trust in the democratic process.
- Children and young people develop transferrable skills, and an understanding of how decisions are made and how to contribute to them.
- They also have a unique opportunity to add to their CV's and reference portfolios and receive accreditations.

In this current economic and political climate, with unprecedented cuts in public spending, involving the public in the design and review of services to ensure that they are responsive and therefore cost effective is increasingly important and it is clear that young people are at the front line of the current challenges. The Coalition Government's vision for Britain includes a focus on

¹ **Lansdown, Gerison** (1995) Taking Part: Children's participation in decision making. IPPR.

the importance of children and young people's involvement and decision making in the design and review of public services, with the 'Big Society' agenda focused on supporting individuals to be active in their communities. In

3.2 Local Context

A key priority of Hammersmith and Fulham Council as part of its corporate responsibility is the engagement and involvement of residents in decision making. Throughout the past few years, there has been increasing focus and commitment to involving young residents across the Council and PCT services. There is a youth involvement structure in place and with support of the Involvement Officer, an increasing number of service areas are engaging young people in their decision making structures.

A clear example of this increasing focus and commitment is also evident in a quote from the Council Communications and Policy Team:

"The ongoing involvement of children and young people is absolutely crucial to the Council, not only in decision making, but also in the formation of ideas before decision making. For example, the Council is working to bring much needed investment to our neighbourhoods over the next 20 years, bringing new job and housing opportunities. Young people stand to benefit the most and need to be involved in helping shape what that future looks like."

4. Borough Youth Forum's Involvement in Overview and Scrutiny in 2011

The Education Select Committee.

4.1. BYF have already successfully engaged with Members of the Education Select Committee (ESC) and on the 11th April 2011 the BYF held an informal workshop with Members of the ESC, with the aim of giving BYF, Members and Officers a chance to meet each other and find out what each other do and for both groups to consider how they can work together and support each other in the future.

4.2. The event was entirely planned and facilitated by Borough Youth Forum Representatives. The young people set the agenda, chaired the meeting and engaged Members and Officers in 'icebreakers' and group discussions.

4.3. Following from the break out session discussions, clear recommendations for continued involvement of the BYF were identified, which included:

- BYF to produce DVD's of young people's views on topics that the Committee are planning to scrutinise to be shown and considered at future Committee meetings.
- The BYF to be used as expert witnesses at Committee meetings where appropriate.
- The BYF be considered to be used to help write and conduct questionnaires, where appropriate.

4.4. Members of the BYF gave the following feedback on the event:

"The evening was a great opportunity for the BYF reps and Councillors from the Education Select Committee and other council employees to get to know what each other does. The evening included a name game as well as the (slightly) more serious question and answer sessions where councillors and BYF reps learnt about each other's responsibilities. This led to lots of action points being made, hopefully leading to the BYF and council having a closer relationship; the evening was very productive and is hopefully the first of many" (Julia Simons, BYF Rep 14)

"Last week we talked to some councillors about what they did. We also told them what we did and talked about how we could work together to achieve both of our goals. I think that it was a very productive session and we should continue to work together to help the young people of Hammersmith and Fulham". (Josie Durley - 15 Deputy Member of Youth Parliament)

4.5. Following the meeting, BYF have produced a video which features young people's views on health, which was shown at the Education Select Committee in September 2011. Feedback was given and additional areas that BYF can explore have been suggested including looking at young people's experiences of sexual health, smoking and alcohol. Young people eating too much fast food was identified as a particular issue on the video so BYF are going to carry out further research into this area and feed this back to the ESC at the next meeting.

The Children's Oral Health Scrutiny Task Group

4.6 During 2011 members of the BYF have also represented young people as expert witnesses on H&F's Children's Oral Health Scrutiny Task Group. Representatives of BYF at the Task Group Stakeholder Forum on 11th May 2011 and met with the Chairman of the Task Group to discuss their views. Members of the BYF also submitted a report as evidence to the Task Group inquiry and contributed to the design and content of questionnaires and publicity, helping to make the inquiry more young people focused.

4.7 The BYF received the final Overview and Scrutiny Children's Oral Health Task Group report and provided a response to the report, along with the Executive Response from the NHS PCT and Council Cabinet, to the Education Select Committee 22nd November 2011.

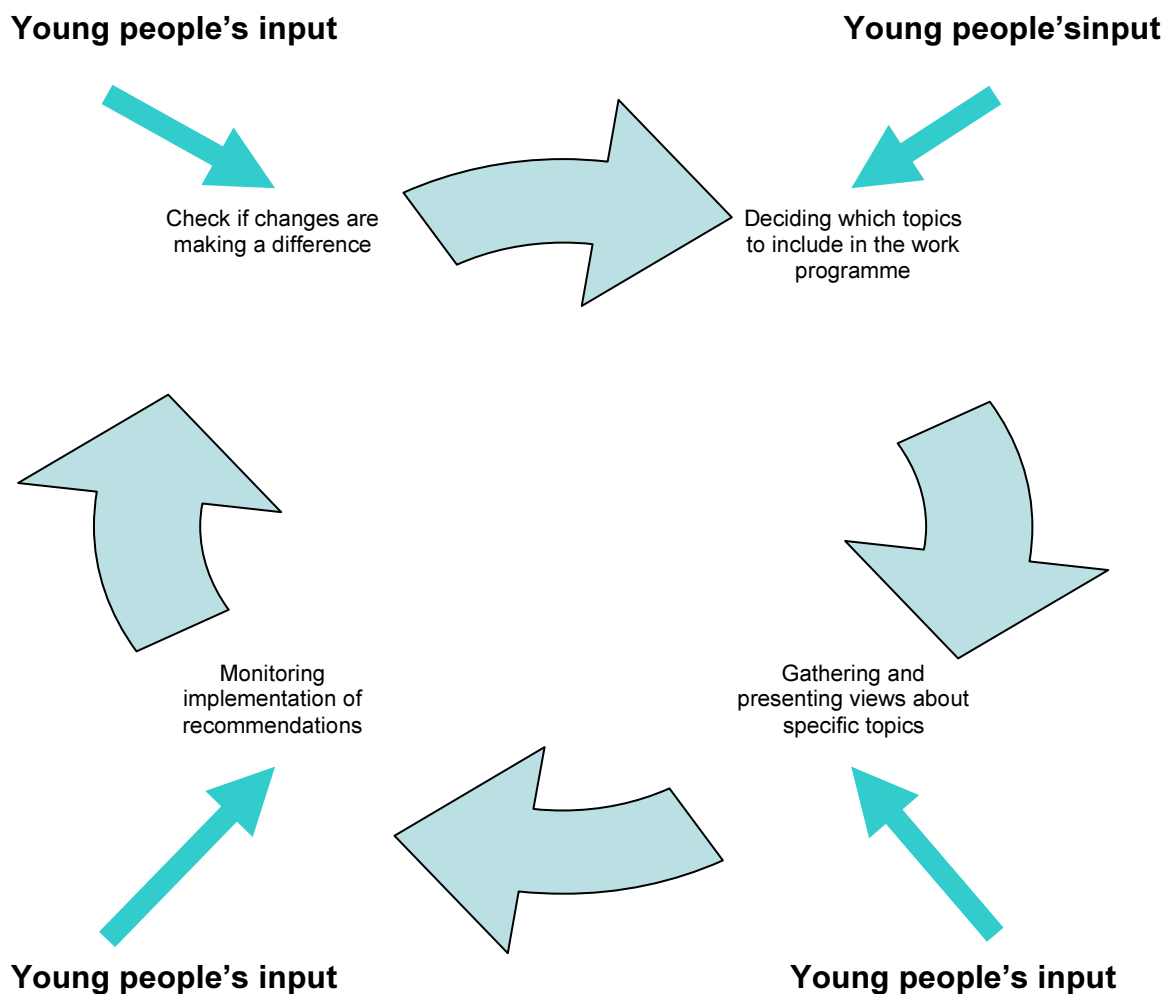
5. How can young people be involved in Overview and Scrutiny?

Through their overview and scrutiny function, councils can use a range of creative and innovative ways to gather an evidence base about what matters to young people and how young people would like to see future services planned and delivered around their needs and aspirations.

'Tomorrow's People?' A guide for overview and scrutiny committees about involving young people in scrutiny by the Centre for Public Scrutiny aims to help overview and scrutiny committees (OCS) understand the context and 'business case' for involving young people in decision-making and to help them be more effective in including young people in their work.

<http://www.cfps.org.uk/what-we-do/publications/cfps-general/?id=150>

The guide explains how there are opportunities to involve young people throughout the whole 'scrutiny cycle,' as illustrated in the diagram below.



As well as involving young people directly in scrutiny reviews, overview and scrutiny committees can ask for young people's views about the topics committees should be covering in their work programmes and include them in monitoring implementation of their recommendations.

6. Case Studies of how other boroughs have successfully involved young people in Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

6.1. Westminster

In Westminster they have recently set up their first scrutiny group made up entirely of young people, consisting of 8-15 young people aged between 16-19, supported by staff from Youth Services and the Member Services Scrutiny Team. The Panel was running until early summer 2011 and reported back to the full Children and Young People Policy and Scrutiny Committee. The panel did not replace the existing ways in which young people are involved the democratic function of the Council (including through the Westminster Youth Council) – in fact it helped to enhance their involvement and help to raise the profile of young people's views.

In addition to influencing the Council and partner's work, there were Personal development gains for young people. Supported by officers, during their reviews they developed new skills in research and evidence collection, running meetings, learning how services are delivered via site visits, interview skills and presentation techniques, report writing and many more key skills. The Panel met senior politicians and officers and organised its own press coverage.

The panel met every two weeks for evidence sessions. They started by asking young people how they perceive Westminster and what their positive and negative experiences are of living in the borough. From the feedback, they were able to prioritise issues they might want to investigate. After a shortlisting exercise, the group decided to investigate the interrelated issues of youth anti-social behaviour, challenging the negative perceptions of young people and how young people can play a greater role in their local communities.

From this work they produced a report, which featured a series of recommendations for the council on these issues, including top tips for getting young people involved in future decision making. The report was presented to the Children and Young People Policy and Scrutiny Committee for consideration before going to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services.

Each meeting of the Panel involved an evidence session where the young people furthered their investigation and a research training element during which the participants have explored how to use a variety of research methods. As part of the project the Panel has conducted the following:

- Question and answer sessions with cabinet members including those with responsibility for children and young people and community protection.
- Constructed, disseminated and analysed a survey of young people to investigate their perceptions of crime, how valued they feel in their communities and if and what they would do to improve their local areas.
- Ran a workshop at the Maida Vale Area Forum to hear the views of local residents.
- Attended a tour of the Ebury Bridge Estate with the neighbourhood crime reduction team.

- Received a presentation on crime and anti-social behaviour in Westminster and posed questions to the community protection team.
- Asked for the views of the Youth Offending Team.
- Met a youth ambassador for the pan-London 99% Campaign promoting the fact that 99% of young Londoners are not involved in serious crime.
- Held a session to learn and ask questions on the value of estate-based intergenerational work.
- Met with the Parliamentary Outreach Services and attended a tour of the Houses of Parliament to learn more about how laws are made and decision-makers are held to account.

Cllr Ian Adams, Chairman of the Children and Young People Policy and Scrutiny Committee, says “we’ve been consistently impressed by the quality of input when young people have participated or provided evidence to scrutiny sessions, so we thought it was high time for them to be given a chance to set their own agenda for scrutiny. Young people are often more informed than they are given credit for and can offer valuable alternative viewpoints on key issues.

The fact that scrutiny could also contribute to the personal development of young people at the same time made it a simple win-win scenario. Having it count toward the service element of the Duke of Edinburgh award is definitely a big bonus in terms of providing an incentive to participate and giving something back to those involved”. Two young people involved in the review commented that;

“The Panel is a brilliant opportunity to express what we feel is important and to scrutinise what we want changed and improved”

“I joined the Panel to contribute to my community and make a difference”.

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6.2. Brent

In Brent they involve members of the Brent Youth Parliament in Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings. Although they understand that it is not the most child friendly forum, they have had some elements of success:

- The chair of the committee is a keen advocate of listening to children and young people and has a proactive approach to involving children and young people’s views and concerns.

- The chair asks the Youth Parliament to bring issues to the attention of the committee (so that the committee can respond to concerns raised directly by children and young people).
- The issues that are highlighted by the Youth Parliament are taken into consideration and on one occasion became a piece of work that was taken on by a task group of the committee.
- The OSC meetings take place in the evenings and the chair always makes sure that the agenda items where children and young people are present are dealt with first so they can leave after that, if needed.
- Transport costs to and from the meetings are reimbursed to children and young people and refreshments are provided to all attendees.
- The chair is keen to have children and young people involved so he makes sure any jargon is explained and also gives them a platform to speak during the meetings.
- Copies of the agenda and supporting documents are sent to the children and young people attending and the participation worker in advance.
- Briefings are given to the young people from the participation lead.
- The young people are invited to the pre-brief for the OSC meeting so they get a feel of what to expect at the meeting.
- The chair meets with members of the Brent Youth Parliament on a quarterly basis in between meetings (in a less formal setting) in order to get a better idea of the issues that affect local residents and especially the children and young people themselves so he can then plan the work of the committee based on resident need.
- The minutes of the meetings always acknowledge the children and young people present and any contributions made by them.
- It has been recommended that where applicable, reports submitted to the OSC that may have a direct impact on children and young people should have a section entitled 'young people's views'. This should demonstrate how children and young people are involved in discussion and that their views are given due weight. We are working towards implementing this in the future.
- Before the meeting, the Participation Worker receives all the relevant papers from the Policy and Regeneration Officer.
- They have some standing members of BYP who attend all the OSC meetings, but any BYP member particularly interested in the agenda item can also attend (so I pick the right young person to attend each meeting).
- The Participation Worker meets with the young people before each meeting to explain what the paperwork is all about.
- The young people attend the pre-meeting where all the presenters and chair have a brief discussion on how the meeting will be conducted. This is a good opportunity for the young people to relax and get to know each person and familiarise themselves with the agenda as well as with the chair. Then immediately after meeting the worker talks to the young people about anything they feel needs to be further investigated and they have an informal chat about how the meeting went.

- Most recently, the BYP executive attended the scrutiny committee to discuss the six library closures in Brent, BYP as a consortium of young people put forward recommendations in relation to the closures, of which one was passed.

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6.3 Hackney

During a recent review of 'Estate Safety and Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour', London Borough of Hackney wanted to address the perception that most anti-social behaviour is caused by young people hanging out and being intimidating. The Scrutiny Commission wanted to understand what young people's views were - notably what their own fears were, what sort of anti-social behaviour most affected them, and how we could improve reporting methods?

Recognising that a bunch of councillors and officers in suits wielding a survey was unlikely to gain the best output from young people on housing estates, the OSC worked closely with the Hackney Youth Parliament, who then took the questionnaires onto the streets and in to youth clubs. The response from young people was far better than could have been achieved without their involvement. Views from the Youth Parliament itself were useful too. A significant amount of preparation went in to it from the Scrutiny side, including a full Saturday session with the Youth Parliament to draft the survey and plan the approach to gaining feedback. They also needed to balance other pressures on young people's time with the need to meet the Scrutiny Commission's tight reporting deadlines. They were fortunate that the Youth Parliament had already received some consultation training, and working closely with the council's Youth Services meant they could rely on the support of enthusiastic staff who, importantly, already had relevant Criminal Records Bureau checks.

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7. Proposals for the involvement of BYF in Hammersmith and Fulham Overview and Scrutiny

The following proposals have been identified to facilitate greater co-ordination, engagement and involvement of BYF in Overview and Scrutiny.

- One or two of the Overview and Scrutiny Board to meet with the BYF to explain what O&S is and their work programme.
- To include on the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2011-12 a presentation by BYF highlighting their role, the way they work, the key issues identified for young people in H&F and the ways in which the BYF and O&S- and other council and community bodies can work together to make sure that issues for young people are included, followed by questions.
- This could potentially result in suggested topics coming forward for OSB across any of the committees, further work for the OSB or in recommendations to the Council Cabinet or other local bodies.
- Witnesses from Westminster and Brent will be invited to a subsequent meeting to give examples of how young people and Scrutiny Committees are working well together.

This could result in actions to ensure the continued involvement of young people, which could for example include:

- Agreed guidance to be produced on how BYF can affect the decision making processes through scrutiny or how scrutiny can engage with young people, which maybe useful to other youth forums and Scrutiny Committees nationally.
- This example to be used as a case study of involvement of young people in formal meetings for inclusion in a toolkit being produced by the Children and Young People's Involvement Officer, which is aimed at extending the scope of Children and Young People's Involvement.
- BYF representatives work with members of OSP to produce a 'young person friendly guide on council decision making structures which could be included in the training for new Borough Youth Forum Representatives and Youth Commissioners.
- The O&S Committees at Hammersmith and Fulham work with the Borough Youth Forum to engage and represent young people wherever young people are a key stakeholder in issues under their consideration.
- The BYF to consider the issues under consideration of H&F O&S Committees into the future (selecting from the O&S Annual Work Programme) and flag up where they think young people have a particular interest by writing to the Chairman of the relevant committee in advance of the meeting.
- BYF to be considered as a one of the external stakeholder groups that Scrutiny has a relationship with and be defined in similar terms. This relationship is characterised by being recognised by OSB, by OSB being open to suggestions on its work programme, especially during its

annual review, by OSB inviting BYF representatives to attend as expert witnesses where appropriate, by BYF making proposal to OSB as part of a scrutiny investigation and submitted as reports and/or evidence to the committees and by OSB making recommendations to BYF where appropriate.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. The Overview and Scrutiny Board note the role that the overview and scrutiny process has had in engaging and involving young people in the local decision making process both in Hammersmith and Fulham and other local authorities and
- ii. consider proposals for how this might be enhanced and embedded into local practice.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

No.	Description of Background Papers	Name/Ext of holder of file/copy	Department/ Location
1.	"Tomorrow's People- A Guide for Overview and Scrutiny Committees about involving young people in scrutiny": The Centre for Public Scrutiny: Local Government Group		http://www.cfps.org.uk/what-we-do/publications/cfps-general/?id=150
2.	The Young People's Scrutiny Panel-Final Report- Westminster	Michael Carr – Scrutiny Development Officer/0208 753 2076	Governance & Scrutiny, Room 133, Hammersmith Town Hall
3.	Brent Youth Parliament Report to Overview and Scrutiny	Brenda Whinnett Children and Young People's Involvement Officer 0208 753 6232	