

BARNSLEY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

**Report of the Borough Secretary
to Cabinet on 30th November 2005**

THE ROLE OF THE YOUTH COUNCIL

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To determine new ways for the Barnsley Youth Council to participate in the Council's modernised constitutional arrangements.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 **That the recommendations of the Democratic Engagement with Young People Member Policy Workshop, for enabling the Barnsley Youth Council to participate in the Council's modernised constitutional arrangements, be approved;**
- 2.2 **That a further report be submitted to the Council with regard to the detailed changes to be incorporated into the Constitution of the Council.**

3. Background and Current Position

- 3.1 Barnsley MBC has a long standing commitment to engaging young people and taking into account their views when determining policies and operational practices. Over the last six years a wide range of youth engagement initiatives have been organised. For example, many Area Forums now include young people co-optees and there has been extensive consultation by services in order to find out their views on a range of issues.
- 3.2 These initiatives have tended to be organised on an ad-hoc basis. We have not yet developed well defined paths to feed in the views of the under 19's into the Council's modernised constitutional arrangements.
- 3.3 Initially, we could not do this because there was not a representative forum or assembly that could speak on behalf of young people. This is no longer the case. One of our most important initiatives to engage with Barnsley's young people has been the creation of a democratically elected Youth Council. This body has been established for several years now, and it is firmly embedded as the representative forum for teenage young people in the Borough.
- 3.4 The Democratic Engagement with Young People Member Policy Workshop has looked at the issue of how the Youth Council can become more involved in the work of the local authority. In particular, the Workshop is keen that the Youth Council should now be able to feed in its views to, and influence the different parts of, the modernised constitutional arrangements, and that it be able to:
- Comment on Cabinet decisions / recommendations to Council / the Forward Plan etc;

- Carry out proactive reviews. These reviews ought not to mirror the ‘adult’ scrutiny, but rather run along lines that the young people feel comfortable with; and
 - Submit evidence to the Scrutiny Commissions when they carry out their own proactive investigations.
- 3.5 This report sets out the Workshop’s recommendations, agreed at its meeting held on 15th November, 2005 to achieve these goals.
4. **Recommendation One: The Youth Council monitor the work of the Executive**
- 4.1 The Youth Council ought to receive and consider at its monthly meetings Cabinet agendas, along with the regularly updated Forward Plan of key decisions – and then identify any concerns it may have about them.
- 4.2 Although it would be a matter for the young people themselves, the Workshop felt that it might be helpful to ask the Youth Council’s members to frame their views in terms of a clearly understood ‘youth criteria’ for judging what may – and may not - have a significant impact on the young people of the borough.
5. **Recommendation Two: The Youth Council feed back its views directly to the Executive**
- 5.1 The Youth Council ought to submit any significant concerns which it has about Executive decisions and recommendations directly to the Cabinet. The best way to do this would be through a report by one of the Executive Directors to Cabinet. The appropriate portfolio holder would, of course, present this report. But the Workshop felt that, when possible, they should also be accompanied by a member of the Youth Council.
6. **Recommendation Three: The Cabinet responds to the Youth Council within a reasonable timescale**
- 6.1 The Executive needs to treat seriously the views of the Youth Council. The Workshop believes that the Cabinet should respond to the Youth Council’s concerns within 28 working days. This is the same time limit placed on responses to Scrutiny Commission proactive reports and other comments.
7. **Recommendation Four: The Youth Council undertake its own proactive investigations into the Council’s policies and operations**
- 7.1 The Workshop felt that the Youth Council should undertake its own proactive ‘scrutiny’ investigations on issues that are important to young people and, crucially, in ways that are interesting to them. Members felt that two such investigations per annum might be a reasonable target to aim for.
- 7.2 When deciding on how to approach these investigations, the Workshop felt that the Youth Council ought to consider:

- What are the key issues for young people – and why?
- What are the key questions about these issues which need to be answered – and who needs to answer them?
- Who ought to gather the evidence – the Youth Council itself or other young people, say at the ‘Speakeasies’?
- How long should the investigations go on for?
- How are they going to draw together their conclusions?

8. **Recommendation Five: The Youth Council report on their proactive investigations directly to the Full Council**

- 8.1 The Youth Council’s proactive investigations should be submitted directly to Full Council under the cover of a report by the appropriate Executive Director. These reports ought to include a specific recommendation that the Cabinet be asked to respond to them.
- 8.2 The Workshop felt that this approach would have many advantages. In particular, it would provide an opportunity for the young people to present their findings to all elected members. This would send out a very positive message. Full Council is the sovereign policy and budget setting body of the local authority. Giving the Youth Council the opportunity to submit their advice to this sovereign body would make it clear that Barnsley MBC was treating their views with great seriousness.

9. **Recommendation Six: The Youth Council participate in the Council’s own scrutiny process**

- 9.1 The Scrutiny Commission Chairs and Vice Chairs ought to meet representatives of the Youth Council on a regular basis – say every six months – to discuss their proactive work programmes and decide which issues the Youth Council would like to give ‘evidence’ on.
- 9.2 The Workshop recognised that various attempts had been made to engage young people in the Council’s scrutiny process – including co-opting them on to the scrutiny commissions. However, members felt that these attempts to get young people involved in scrutiny had only been partially successful.
- 9.3 There are several explanations for this. One important practical reason is that the Scrutiny Commission meetings take place during the day time. Consequently, they clash with the young people’s school/college commitments. But an even more fundamental problem is that many of the young people find it difficult to contribute because they are simply not comfortable with the adult style of the scrutiny meetings –especially when the commissions are looking at issues which are not directly relevant to them.
- 9.4 The Workshop felt that a more effective approach might be for the Commissions to discuss with the Youth Council the issues which they are planning to scrutinise and to agree those that the young people should be consulted about. This would then allow the Youth Council to discuss the issues involved with other under 18’s and to then submit their views as evidence to the Commissions.

9.5 When the Commissions have completed their investigations they need to explain to the Youth Council how they took on board their evidence in terms of deciding their final report and recommendations, or why they rejected their views. In other words they must give the young people some proper feed back.

10. **Recommendation Seven: Appropriate officer support is provided to the Youth Council**

10.1 Discussions ought to take place at an officer level to provide an appropriate level of additional assistance to the Youth Council. The Workshop recognised that the Youth Council members would require a significant amount of officer support if they are to operate in this revised way. Although much of this support would fall to the Youth Service, members felt that other parts of the local authority – notably the Borough Secretary's and Chief Executive's Departments - might also have an important role to play in supporting the young people.

11. **Options**

11.1 Not to approve the Workshop's recommendations so that the Youth Council continued to participate in the Council's modernised constitutional arrangements on an ad hoc basis as at present. This approach would fail to secure the more effective engagement with young people which the proposals of the Workshop are seeking to secure.

11.2 To approve the recommendations in the report so that formal mechanisms are in place to ensure that the voice of young people in Barnsley can be heard within the Council, via the democratically elected Youth Council. This is the recommended option.

12. **Local Area Implications**

12.1 There are no direct local area implications associated with this report.

13. **Compatibility with European Convention on Human Rights**

13.1 The report is compatible with the European Convention on Human Rights and complements the obligations under the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child.

14. **Ensuring Social Inclusion**

14.1 It is considered that approval of the recommendations in this report will contribute towards Social Inclusion in the Borough, by allowing young people, through the Youth Council, to contribute in a more meaningful way to the processes for the planning and delivery of services, especially those affecting young people.

15. **Reduction of Crime and Disorder**

15. It can be envisaged that the development of more formal consultation processes with young people along the lines set out in this report, will be beneficial in helping reduce the level of youth crime and disorder in the borough

16. **Financial Implications**

16.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

17. **Risk Management Considerations**

17.1 It is considered that the recommendations in the report would have minimal, if any, associated risks for the Authority.

18. **Consultations**

18.1 There are no direct employee, legal, policy or other implications for the Council arising from this report and all relevant consultations have been carried out as part of the deliberations of the Democratic Engagement with Young People Member Policy Workshop.

19. **Proposal**

19.1 That the proposals set out above are approved and reported in due course to full Council for approval and eventual incorporation in the Council's Constitution.

20. **Background Papers**

20.1 Papers kept on file in the Borough Secretary's Department which are available for inspection.

20.2 Papers on file relating to the Democratic Engagement with Young People Member Policy Workshop, kept in the Cabinet Support Unit.

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