

# Voice & Influence

REPORT 2003/04



**BARNSELY**  
Metropolitan Borough Council

# Introduction

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Young people are young citizens. They represent a very important part of every community. In common with other sections of the community, young people have their own needs, views and aspirations. In Barnsley we strongly believe that it is every young person's right to express their views and we are always ready to listen to them. It is essential that, as a Council, and along with other local agencies and service providers, we involve young people in decisions that affect their lives.



As you read this report you will see that we have invested a large amount of resources to engage young people within the democratic process. We now have democratically elected Youth Council that is really active in representing its constituents both at a local, and at a Borough-wide level.

There are structures in place to ensure that we involve as many young people as possible. We also aim to ensure that these young people reflect the diverse communities they represent.

I do hope you enjoy reading the report and find it both informative and a useful resource.

Phil Coppard  
Chief Executive  
Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council

# 1 Background

Over the last three years, Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council has undertaken a wide range of initiatives to ensure young people have their voices heard. These initiatives involve supporting young people in their own communities to develop projects around issues that affect them. There have also been Borough-wide initiatives that have brought together young people to discuss and share their issues/concerns and enable them to move issues forward across Barnsley.

Three years ago, the Council Cabinet received a report about the democratic engagement of young people. An Elected Member's Workshop had developed ten recommendations that the Council might utilise to improve its approach to engaging young people. In response to this, the Council committed some resources and worked on the recommendations through its Youth Service.

The Youth Service has responded to the challenge by developing a specific arm of the Service to take responsibility for delivering Voice and Influence activity. The Youth Service's Voice and Influence arm coordinates this work across the Council services and its partners. This initiative is in line with the Government's Transforming Youth Work agenda.



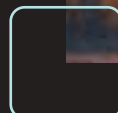
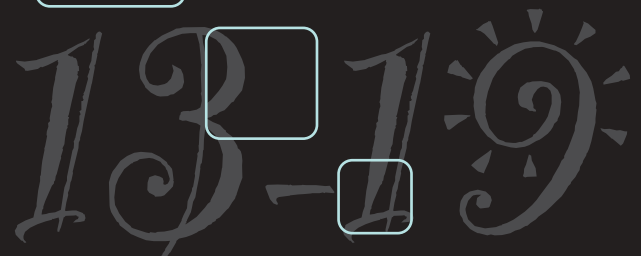
# Resources/ Staffing

The budget for Voice and Influence work including staffing, cost currently stands at £285,000 per annum.

The staff team consists of a full – time Team Leader for Voice and Influence; one full-time Involving Young People’s coordinator, one full-time Youth Council Support Worker; and a team of fifteen Participation Workers. Nine Participation workers are funded through the Youth Service’s core budget and five are externally funded Participation workers. The Participation Workers are all half time workers. The Voice and Influence arm of the Service has the equivalent of ten and a half full – time posts. This gives a staffing ratio of one full-time worker to approximately one thousand eight hundred young people aged thirteen to nineteen within Barnsley.

As part of its Modernisation Agenda, Barnsley created a model that divided the Borough into nine area forums to aid its political / decision - making processes. Each of the nine forums has three Council Wards within it. The majority of Council services and allocation of staffing resources are defined within or through the Area Forums. When the Youth Service re – structured recently it also deployed its staffing and resources to the Area Forum structure.

In the Voice and Influence arm there is one core funded participation worker per Area Forum and the remaining six are externally funded. The Kendray Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder funds one of these posts; four are funded through SRB; and one through Connexions - South Yorkshire. The SRB and Neighbourhood Management posts are for specific communities where as the Connexions post is a Borough- wide initiative. All the externally funded posts have a clear remit but works within the overall Voice and Influence action plan for Barnsley.



# discussion action points

## 2 Progress/achievements

### creating an infrastructure

Through the Participation Workers' involvement in specific geographical areas, it has been possible to ensure that there is an infrastructure in place across the Borough. This means that young people have the opportunity to engage with decision makers wherever they come from. Young people have been contacted through:

**Schools**

**Youth centres**

**Detached work - on the streets**

**Voluntary sector organisations**

**Borough wide conferences**

**Residential experiences**

However, the mainstays of the infrastructure are the *Speakout* and *Speakeasy* meetings.

**Speakout** meetings are for young people and take place monthly in each of the nine Area Forums. They are a key part of the Voice and Influence strategy.

A *Speakout* is an open meeting organised with and for young people by the Participation Workers. Young people set the agenda. Adults with responsibilities (decision-makers) for those services relating to topical issues/concerns are regularly invited to attend. Decision makers are given the opportunity to answer questions about the issues on the agenda. They also have the

opportunity to ask young people questions. At the close of discussion, action points are agreed and recorded, and then both decision makers and young people discuss when and how feedback is to take place.

Clearly not all young people wish to attend *Speakout* meetings. The Participation Workers therefore also seek to engage young people in other situations in order to identify their views. The workers then take responsibility for feeding back to those young people.

Participation Workers also support other projects with young people. These projects may originate from a *Speakout* or simply from coming into contact with young people within their own or other environments. Such projects often enable young people to influence decisions and enable them to participate in, and gain an understanding of, democratic processes.



# democratic process

**Speakeasies** happen on a quarterly basis in each of the Area Forums. All the young people who have been involved in projects, *Speakouts*, and other activities are invited to attend. Elected Members are also invited to come along and participate. The *Speakeasies* are a celebration event as well as being an information sharing exercise. They enable young people to come together across a specific geographical area and to take forward issues/concerns on to an Area Forum level.

*The Speakouts and Speakeasies* have been very successful and on average have around twenty to thirty young people in attendance. The attendance often depends on the issue(s) that are been discussed. For example, recently over fifty young people attended a *Speakout* about the Police and a local skate park.

A wide range of decision makers have attended these events including the Leader of the Council and the Principal Youth Officer. Numerous projects have developed from the *Speakouts*. For example, there has been a video project to put forward a case for a local skate park and a mobile phone marking project. The meetings also enable the workers to consult with young people around specific topics. A good example of this is the recent Green paper consultation on "Every Child Matters". It was through the *Speakout* events amongst others that young people identified that they would like to have a democratically elected Youth Council.

*Youth Council* - the workers within the Voice and Influence team agreed to work alongside young people to facilitate an election of a Youth Council. It had not been the team's aim to encourage forums/councils to be developed as a means to represent a geographical area of young people. They had previously piloted this model and found it to be accessed mainly by young people who were not representative of their communities. This is what had prompted the decision to create the 'open' meetings on the *Speakout/speakeasy* model.

However, young people were now asking for a Youth Council when there was an infrastructure in place of 'open' meetings. It was felt that an elected Youth Council could now be a representative body as it could now access its constituents through the *Speakout / Speakeasy* model.



# 7 nominations

## election of a youth council

2002/2003 saw the first democratic election of a Youth Council (aged thirteen to nineteen) in Barnsley. Every young person within the age range on the Connexions Core database in Barnsley received a polling card telling them about the Youth Council and how, when and where to vote. Over forty-five polling stations were set up for the election. These were in Secondary schools, Youth Centres, Community Centres and even in bus shelters. A total of seventy-nine nominations were received and eventually forty-nine candidates stood for election for the eighteen seats, two per Area Forum.

Over five thousand young people aged thirteen to nineteen years of age voted which was a thirty-two percent turn out of those young people who were eligible to vote. The outcome was Barnsley's first democratically elected Youth Council. A full report on the election process is available for Barnsley Metropolitan Council's Youth Service *Elections for a Youth Council - Report 2002/03*.

The Youth Council has a budget of £50,000 to help it facilitate the process of engaging with its constituents. It has a full-time support worker to assist it in its duties. The Youth Councillors have been extremely busy within their first year of office and below are some of their achievements:

- Attended and organised *Speakouts/Speakeasies*.
- Organised and ran an anti-racism event in Barnsley. Over one hundred young people attended.
- Held Youth Council surgeries.
- Developed a web site.
- Attended Area Forum meetings.
- Undertaken presentations at Community partnerships and Area Forums.
- Made a video for Barnsley Children's Trust submission.
- Spoke at the Children's Trust pathfinder launch in Barnsley.
- Consulted their constituents at youth centres, on the streets and through youth summits.
- Presented young people's issues in a wide range of different decision-making forums.



## youth summits

The full Youth Council agreed that they would like to spend some of their budget on collecting young people's views in a variety of different ways. They agreed that a good way to achieve this would be through creative workshops such as Art, Drama, Dance, "DJ-ing", Rap and Graffiti art. In order to come to a decision as to which issues to explore they split into four groups and produced a list of issues. Each group then fed back to the main group and the issues were categorised under themes. The themes they chose for the workshops were:

**Remaking Barnsley**

**Health**

**Education**

**Aspirations**

The Youth Council supported by the Youth Council Support Worker and the Participation Workers then undertook the task of planning and delivering the consultations with young constituents.

Each workshop was based on one of the above themes so that young people could focus their views and opinions into key action points for their area. The Youth Council decided to run an event (a Youth Summit) in each of the Area Forums. Prior to undertaking the Youth Summits they sought recognition from the Local Strategic Partnership that the findings from the Youth Summits would be discussed at a senior level by all the key decision making organisations within the Borough.

The Summits were an amazing success. Over one thousand young people took part. Further, there has already been movement on changing the findings into action.

The Local Strategic Partnership has taken on the task of writing out to all its members / partners to ask for a response to the issues/action points raised at the Youth Summits. The Officer responsible for overseeing the Barnsley Community Plan is committed to ensuring that key actions, in consultation with young people, are incorporated into the plan. The Council will look closely at the action points and work with the Youth Council to work some of the action points into projects. The Council where appropriate have agreed to ensure that there are some 'quick wins'. For a full in depth report and the full findings from the summits contact Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council's Youth Service for a copy of *Youth Summits, report hosted by Barnsley Youth Council 2003*.

## web site

▶ In order to engage with as many young people as possible the Youth Council initiated and worked alongside a web site designing company to build and host a web site for all young people in Barnsley. The web site can be found at: [www.barnsleyyouth.com](http://www.barnsleyyouth.com). This website is serviced by the Voice and Influence strand of Barnsley Youth Service.

## advocacy conference

The Youth Council is only one of the mechanisms to enable young people to engage with decision-makers. The Youth Councillors have access to their own training opportunities but workers felt that many other young people also take on a role of advocating on behalf of their peers. These young people did not always manage to access training opportunities so a two - day training residential was organised to develop advocacy skills.

The event had over forty young people in attendance and they explored many issues, including what is meant by advocacy. The event was extremely successful and can be summarised by the quote from a sixteen - year old young man who attended the conference:

"...it made me realise that we all have some prejudices in us but until we recognise this, we will never be really good advocates for we will always be leaving some one out"

## under eighteens

### "Teen Nights"

The Voice and Influence team are currently involved in a project at one of the local nightclubs. They hold an under eighteen night on a regular basis in order to raise awareness of the opportunities for young people to "have their say". The events have also been very useful to check the findings from the Youth Summits and other events with a larger audience. On average there are well over six hundred young people attending these events. Some of the Youth Councillors also attend on a regular basis. They use the events as a way of accessing some of those constituents who they would not usually contact through the *Speakouts* or Youth Centres. During Democracy Week 13th to 19th October the Youth Councillors ran a ballot at this event to see if the voting age should be lowered from eighteen to sixteen years of age. The result was a resounding yes.



## Single Regeneration

### Budget project

Four and a half posts are funded under the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB). These workers have a slightly different remit than the base budget funded Participation Workers. They have to involve young people in accredited training and produce a young person's action plan that interfaces with the local Community Partnership's action plan. Workers deliver programmes of personal and social development too. These programmes are currently being run as pilots in order to assess the needs of the young people and look at possible future projects.

The project has been very successful and has seen twenty young people undertaking both Youth Achievement Awards and gaining First Aid Certificates through St Johns Ambulance Brigade. The workers also work closely with organisations from the voluntary and community sectors. Funding has already been secured to enable one pilot project to become fully operational.

## Connexions

### South Yorkshire

Engaging Young People is a central theme to the Connexions service. The Barnsley Voice and Influence team have worked alongside Connexions South Yorkshire throughout the piloting of its Engaging Young People's strand in 2001. Barnsley Youth Service has been instrumental in supporting Connexions South Yorkshire's launch of its Engaging Young People strand in 2003.

# 'have their say'



## United Kingdom Youth Parliament

Barnsley's Voice and Influence team leader is also a key member of Connexions South Yorkshire's Voice and Influence group. This group has the responsibility for ensuring that the Connexions delivery in this area is "joined up" across South Yorkshire. The budget for the Voice and Influence strand through Connexions- South Yorkshire has now been split amongst the four Local Authorities. Each Authority has developed a delivery plan for its own individual Voice and Influence Connexions activity. In order to ensure that Barnsley's delivery plan is put in place, a half time Participation Worker has been recruited to join the team.

Young people from Barnsley are involved within the Young People's Advisory Group (YPAG) for Connexions South Yorkshire, the Teen Trust and the editorial of the Real Life Connexions Magazine.

A conference was held in March 2003 for year ten and eleven students from Barnsley Secondary schools. The conference was organised and delivered by the Barnsley Voice and Influence team in partnership with the Borough's Connexions Personal Advisors.

When Connexions South Yorkshire was inspected by OFSTED a group of young people across the sub region were trained to become youth inspectors and undertook a role with the OFSTED inspectors throughout the fieldwork inspections.

The group is still in operation and these young people now undertake a similar role as part of Barnsley Youth Service's Peer Assessment team.

*Speakout* meetings also discuss issues that are relevant to Connexions Service delivery and Personal Advisors are invited to attend.

The United Kingdom Youth Parliament (UKYP) has been in operation for the last three years. Barnsley is entitled to send two members of the Youth Parliament (MYPs). In 2001 and 2002 'open' elections were held and the seats were filled on both occasions. The role of the MYPs consists of attending both national and regional meetings, and formulating the UKYP manifesto.

In 2003 it was agreed that the two MYPs would be elected by the democratically elected Youth Council. Now when young people vote for their Youth Councillor they also have to consider that this candidate, if successful, could also stand to represent the Borough at a national level. Out of the eighteen youth councillors six stood for election for the UKYP and their fellow youth councillors successfully voted two into office. This was felt to be the best way of gaining truly representative MYPs.



## Europe

Barnsley young people have had the opportunity to visit the European Parliament in Strasbourg in September 2002. They have also made links with their twin town in Germany, Schwabisch Gmund. Schwabisch Gmund also have a democratically elected Youth Council and they undertook a return visit to Barnsley in July 2003.

The groups have kept in contact and the web site hosted by the Barnsley Youth Council also has a German translation built into the site. Both groups want to address the issue around the European Youth Parliament that they feel is not a democratically elected body. One of the young people who is particularly active within democratic engagement in Barnsley has been successful in obtaining a place on the European Youth Parliament. He will use the opportunity to start to address this issue within the organisation.

Both parties are currently drawing up plans for another visit, possibly to Brussels to discuss this issue with the organisers of the European Youth Parliament in 2004.

## Elected Members

The support given by Barnsley's Elected Members to the Voice and Influence initiative has been crucial for the success of the work. The support has come in the first instance through the "Democratic Engagement of Young People" Members' workshop and through Elected Members attending *Speakouts/speakeasies*.

Elected Members have also supported young people in engaging with decision makers on a day-to-day basis. There is a real political will by the Elected Members in Barnsley to ensure that young people not only have their say, but that they are also able to participate in a meaningful manner.

open elections



## 3 Progress/achievements

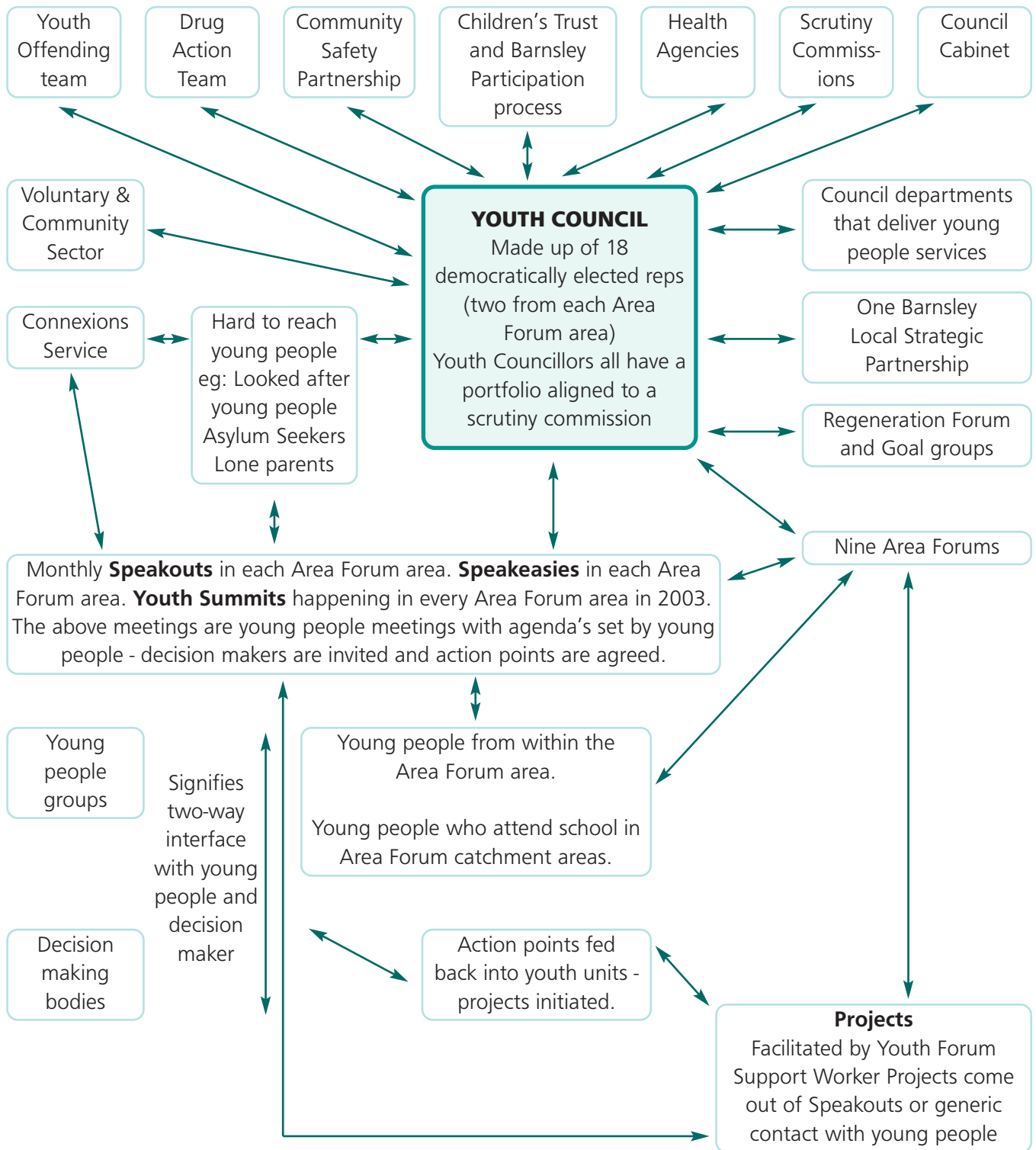
### Impacts

One of the key issues for measuring the success of the democratic engagement of young people in Barnsley is not only how many young people are participating, but whether or not these young people reflect the diversity of their communities. Further it is important to record what decisions have been influenced and the effects both have in changing service delivery or improving amenities. Below is a list of some of the impacts that have been achieved:

- Three local outdoor skate parks built and in operation (and another one planned).
- Youth Shelters built across the Borough.
- Large indoor skate park planned for the Town Centre (just requires site to be identified).
- Decisions about service delivery have been changed due to young people's input within youth centres.
- Funding has been obtained to run projects specifically identified by young people.
- Policing methodologies have been reviewed and changed after a consultation at a Speakout.
- Funding given to initiate a Youth Council and allocate it its own budget after young people had identified the need.
- Litter bins, litter pick undertaken and bulbs planted within a local community in a project initiated via a Speakout.
- The impact that the youth summits have created within the borough and all the service delivers has been phenomenal. As highlighted earlier in the report commitment from decision makers has been given.
- Structures have been developed or are under development which will ensure that 'meaningful involvement between young people and decision – makers is happening and ensures accountability (see structural diagram over)



# Structural diagram of interface between young people and decision makers



# Structures for engagement

The “Democratic engagement of young people” Members’ workshop produced a report with ten recommendations three years ago that set the scene for all the work that has followed. The Workshop is still operational and meets on a bi – monthly basis. The minutes of the meetings can be found on the Council web site: [www.barnsley.gov.uk](http://www.barnsley.gov.uk) The Workshop still plays a key role in the work and is attended by both Chief Officers and Elected Members. The Workshop has produced three Cabinet reports on the progress of the work and has made recommendations for developments since its first report in November 2000.

As can be seen in the diagram there are now clear structures for young people’s views and opinions to be fed directly into decision - making bodies. The Youth Councillors identify at *Speakouts*, *Speakeasies* and more recently at Youth Summits young people’s issues/concerns and views. They then feed them into the full Youth Council who then direct issues to the appropriate decision making bodies. Some actions can be taken forward via the *Speakouts* where decision – makers and young people come together and agree points of action. Participation Workers then support young people to develop their action points.

Recent developments have just seen the Youth Councillors take on a portfolio of one of the Council’s Scrutiny Commissions. There are eighteen Youth Councillors and six scrutiny commissions. Therefore three Youth Councillors all have the same portfolio as one of the scrutiny commissions. The Youth Councillors are just about to embark on a training programme to support them in this new development. The Youth Councillors want to have the same portfolios as the Scrutiny Commissions in order to ‘tighten’ up the structures because the scrutiny commissions have the role of scrutinising council cabinet decisions. They felt that if they were linked into this system it would enable them to have a role in scrutinising issues and to feed in issues/ concerns that they gather from *Speakouts* etc. that directly affect their constituents.



The Youth Councillors will not only have the option to attend scrutiny but also the opportunity to participate in working parties. Both the scrutiny commission officers and the Youth Council Support Worker will support them to do this effectively. The interface will be two way as they will be able to participate in scrutinising issues that come out of cabinet but also have the opportunity to feed issues that come out of *Speakouts/speakeasies* or full youth council meetings directly into scrutiny.

An example of this is where Youth Councillors will be feeding in the relevant action points from the Youth Summits to the scrutiny commission for their portfolio. Youth Councillors feel strongly that if they have to scrutinise issues that directly affect young people they will take the issue back to the full Youth Council. This will then enable the individual youth councillors to take the relevant issue to *Speakouts* and other young people's venues in order to consult their constituents. Once all the youth councillors have undertaken this task they will feed back their constituents' responses at a full youth council meeting. The relevant youth councillors will then feed back into scrutiny the information the youth councillors obtained from across the Borough.

Another development that is taking place is that individual Council Services are being asked to produce an action/delivery plan stating how they propose to involve young people in the shaping and influencing of their service delivery. This process will be aided by the completion of the Service Delivery self-evaluation form, completed by each Executive Director. The Service Delivery self – evaluation questionnaire

form can be found in the appendix of this report. It is envisaged that these findings will be collated in the New Year.

Due to the structures that are in place and recent proposals, systems will be in place to ensure accountability where service providers propose to either develop projects or make changes. Therefore, an issue that affects young people could be identified by either a Youth Councillor, Participation Worker or a worker from another organisation and can then be very quickly passed onto the appropriate service/department in order for a response or action to be taken. The systems also work the other way in that organisations/agencies/departments will have a structure that enables them to interface with young people across the Borough.



## Moving towards a strategy active involvement of young people

A lot of progress has been made over the last three years, however, the Voice and Influence team still feel that a full strategy has yet to be fully developed. The philosophy of the team is that this process should not be rushed and time taken to carefully evaluate each part of the Voice and Influence strategy. The mere existence of a Youth Council, Youth Parliament or youth forums do not mean that the process of youth engagement is by any means complete. The process can become tokenistic if only a narrow cross-section of young people are engaged in the process.

The capacity building has been undertaken and structures are now in place but there are still some pieces of the jigsaw to be completed before we can honestly say that we have a fully functional strategy. Undertaking the work of engaging young people with decision makers and ensuring that it was an equal process was never going to be easy. It has required a lot of resources and in some aspects necessitated a cultural change.

Work in implementing the strategies will only be complete when all the action plans from all the service providers are finalised. These plans must show how they are going to meaningfully involve young people in shaping their service delivery. Further, the structure of the youth council and scrutiny commissions needs to be in full operation. A youth charter needs to be developed and this Charter needs to be assessed by the NYA/LGA "Hear By Right standards as 'emerging' in all its aspects before we feel that we have a full working strategy.



## Appendix

### Self – audit task: Working with Young People

#### How does your service value the involvement of young people?

- Has your service made an explicit statement that young people will be involved and consulted wherever possible?
- Is your service clear about its purpose in relation to young people?
- Have young people themselves been involved in determining how or when they might participate or be consulted?

#### Does your service plan for the involvement of young people?

- Does your service have a clear idea of all the ways in which it currently involves or consults young people?
- Is there a strategic plan, which sets out how the sustained involvement of young people will be developed?
- Does your service have a specific budget allocated to support the development of young people's involvement?

#### How does the structure of your service affect young people?

- Is there a worker who is responsible or will be responsible for the involvement of young people in the service?
- Do you use/consult different groups of young people when you require the views of young people?

#### Are the systems within your service conducive to participation by young people?

- Is it easy for young people to pass on complaints, suggestions, compliments and ideas to your service?
- When you consult with young people, is there a system for determining how to find the most appropriate group of young people?
- How do you give feedback to those young people consulted?

participation

decision-making

### **How do staff relate to young people?**

- Are all staff aware of the policy to involve young people in decision-making within your service?
- Does staff fully understand the barriers to participation that young people may experience?
- Are there members of staff designated to support the active involvement of young people before, during and after the decision-making process?
- Do job descriptions for staff set out clearly the ways in which they will be expected to involve or consult young people?
- In what ways are young people involved in the selection of staff who will be working with them?

### **How are skills and/or knowledge relating to the active participation of young people developed in your organisation?**

- How complex is the jargon, paperwork or procedures for your service?
- Do you have any staff-training programmes, which support them in actively involving young people?
- Are there ways in which young people can be accredited for their participation in your service?

### **Who will be the link person between your organisation and the youth council?**

- Which worker within your organisation would be the most relevant link between the youth council and the organisation?
- Will this worker be able to access structures within your organisation to direct information to the most appropriate person/department?

service

If you would like to find out more about the work undertaken in Barnsley to engage young people within decision making processes contact Andy Fleming Team Leader, 'voice and influence', Barnsley Youth Services at [andyfleming@barnsley.gov.uk](mailto:andyfleming@barnsley.gov.uk)

**NRF**



**Barnsley Youth Service**  
*Working with and for Young People*

**connexions**



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