

Voice and Involvement of Young People in Scrutiny Task Group 2019/20

Report of the Children, Young People & Family Support Scrutiny Committee task group – February 2020

1. Introduction

Children, Young People & Family Support Scrutiny Committee 2019/20 set up a task group to look at how to increase the voice and involvement of young people in scrutiny to work with young people for them to input to the work programme and agenda items; for young people to decide and shape how they are involved and what they are interested in; and to consider how to reach out to more young people.

2. The task group

The task group was led by Cllr Jim Steinke a member of Children, Young People & Family Support Scrutiny Committee. Our approach was through a mix of the whole Committee hearing from young people, such as the special meeting held to hear Make Your Mark results, and smaller group working for other activity. The task group included Jim Steinke, Mike Chaplin, Sam Evans, Julie Grocutt, and Colin Ross who are members of Children, Young People & Family Support Scrutiny Committee.

3. Activity

Over 5 months (October 2019-February 2020) the task group and the Committee undertook the following activity:

- a. The Committee shared their work programme with young advisors and invited young advisors to comment on the topics such as Adoption and Fostering Annual Reports, this informed committee consideration of these reports;
- b. The task group met with officers who support Youth Council and Young Advisors to find out about young people's existing governance and involvement in the city;
- c. They also met with Sheffield City Council Children and Young People Involvement Manager to find out about the Children in Care Council and the Sheffield Care Leavers Union;
- d. The Committee invited Youth Cabinet to present the Make Your Mark 2019 results; and
- e. Members of the task group met subsequently with Youth Cabinet to find out more about best ways to communicate with young people, how non-party political education should look in schools, and enhancing the Youth Cabinet relationship with Sheffield City Council.

4. Findings

4.1 Children, Young People & Family Support Scrutiny Committee on 17th December

Members of Youth Cabinet attended the CYP&FS Scrutiny Committee on 17th

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December 2019, the key points raised for follow up were:

- How to use communications platforms to involve YP
- Work with Learn Sheffield to encourage schools to reinstate politics education
- Reinvent young people surgeries; improve the relationship between Youth Cabinet and SCC democratic system.

4.2 Meeting with Youth Cabinet on 13th February

4.2.1 Communicating with young people

Young People suggested the following methods:

- School – assemblies, newsletters, handouts, leaflets, posters on walls, school councils, videos, quizzes, games, competitions, external presenters/speakers
- Social Media – Instagram rather than Facebook.
- Specific events for young people – e.g. Big City Conversation could have had some of these events.

During discussion, however, the young people made the following points:

- Social media is for “down” or “chill” time, their safe space to be themselves, so they don’t want serious issues via this route.
- They need signposting where to get neutral information from to make their own minds up.
- Information needs to be punchy and to the point, too much will switch them off
- Experience with school councils varies across the City, some are proactive and successful whereas others are less so.
- A lot goes on in schools, young people are doing lots of things so communication is a two way process, such as how the Council know about what young people are doing? For example, recent boycott of school canteens by students over the use of single use plastics.

4.2.2 Teaching politics in schools/what political education means to young people

Ways of teaching politics should be changed – political education, system not party politic – young people want to be informed and independent. The following points were made:

- Young people don’t want party politics or biased opinions, they want facts to make up their own minds.
- They are more interested in issues, e.g. NHS, Climate Change or more personal/local issues of interest.
- They want to practice politics and lead by example rather than be taught it e.g. schools councils being involved in decision making in the school. The senior leadership/governors attitude to this is crucial, it needs their buy in.
- They would like their say in allocation of resources, why do some subjects get less resource and become less accessible? E.g. music, drama, extracurricular

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clubs etc...

- They should be consulted in the decision making in their schools – some examples of changes that weren't consulted on were given; introducing a new queue system in the canteen; closing of an LGBT club.
- Information should be fair and balanced and presented as part of other lessons. E.g. History or languages (an example of a Spanish lesson looking at the politics of Catalonia was used as this had been a lively and engaging lesson).
- Not many schools have politics as an option and young people felt that schools were reluctant to allow lessons to facilitate political discussions for fear of criticism. Teachers need to be supported to teach politics.
- Practical and interactive lessons are best, for example using debates to generate interest in politics, focusing on real issues.
- Young people need a safe space to talk about politics.
- Schools too often use exam time as an "excuse" not to offer these activities.

4.2.3 Relationship with Sheffield City Council

- Youth Cabinet enjoyed their recent attendance at scrutiny committee and were pleased to have Councillors at their meeting.
- They are keen to develop this two way communication.
- They want the opportunity to raise things with the Council on an issue by issue basis – for example they would like to do a review on single use plastics with the Council, based on a successful review like this in Birmingham.
- The current Climate Emergency is a long term policy issue which has more long term impact on Young People than adults, so it would be a good issue to get young people involved in.
- An ongoing relationship will make politics more natural and acceptable to young people – they are currently very disengaged because they don't believe anyone takes them seriously so what is the point?
- They want to be consulted and involved.

4.3 Sheffield City Council Governance Review

It is worth noting that at the same time as engaging in this task group work, young people also engaged in the Governance Review being undertaken by Sheffield Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee, the outcome of the Governance Review was presented to Full Council 8th January 2020. Recommendation 9 below is an enhancement of the principles of governance and ambitions considered by Full Council on 8th January.

<http://democracy.sheffield.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=154&MId=7338&Ver=4>

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5. Recommendations

Our recommendations are drawn from the findings. Whilst our purpose was to look at voice and involvement of young people in scrutiny, there are some points we heard that reach beyond remit of scrutiny and are related to wider governance arrangements of executive too. We have crafted the recommendations as practical actions specific to the scrutiny committees or for the Council in the forthcoming year and a final recommendation of a young people targeted governance principle for future years.

FORTHCOMING YEAR PRACTICAL ACTIONS FOR SCRUTINY

1. **Sheffield City Council to share its Scrutiny Work Programme on a regular basis with Youth Cabinet so that they can engage in issues of interest.**
2. **Youth Cabinet to be invited to scrutiny meetings on a regular basis.**
3. **Establish regular two way communication of issues, particularly alternate attendance at Scrutiny and Youth Cabinet meetings.**
4. **Consider conducting a review with Youth Cabinet of single use plastics.**
5. **Scrutiny to encourage the Council to raise the issue of politics on the curriculum with schools and how it could be put into practice with School Councils.**

FORTHCOMING YEAR PRACTICAL ACTIONS FOR THE COUNCIL

6. **Sheffield City Council to share list of citizen space consultations with Youth Cabinet on a regular basis, to allow them to be consulted on an issue by issue basis.**
7. **Sheffield governance arrangements work in partnership with Sheffield youth governance arrangements, as a start Sheffield City Council Cabinet be invited to Youth Cabinet meetings on a regular basis, and develop other ways to link.**
8. **As an organisation look at our style of communications, use connections that work for young people.**

FUTURE YEARS GOING FORWARD

9. **Establish principle of youth cabinet and young people involvement in decision/policy/scrutiny meetings in Sheffield City Council governance structure, and ensure this is embedded in our governance principles.**