

# Report of the Scrutiny Review of Young People's Citizenship and Involvement

## 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Review was conducted by the Scrutiny Sub-Committee for Education and Culture. They agreed its findings and recommendations on 4<sup>th</sup> March 2003. It was then ratified by the Scrutiny Committee on 25<sup>th</sup> March 2003 and went to Cabinet on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2003 where all of the recommendations were accepted.
- 1.2 The Scrutiny Sub-Committee for Learning & Leisure (new name) is planning to monitor the implementation of the review's recommendations during the course of 2004-5.

## 2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 On 4<sup>th</sup> July 2002 the Sub-committee agreed to conduct a cross-cutting review of Youth Citizenship and Decision-Taking. The next Sub-committee meeting approved the Terms of Reference and the formation of a working party with the understanding that the terms of reference be fine tuned and a programme of work developed. The working party membership was Councillor Brian Udell, Councillor Paul Smith, Councillor Greta Sohoje and Councillor Julian Storey, who were supported by Roger King of the Education Department, Audrey Cosens of Democratic Services, Joan Matlock (and from December 2002) Rachel Chapman of the Policy Unit.
- 2.2 The Working Party agreed a working definition of 'citizenship' for the purposes of this review, as:

'The degree to which an individual young person feels that they belong and are involved in:

The decision making process  
Contributing to their community  
Challenging what is done  
Deciding how money is spent.'

It modified the name of the review to be more user friendly. The age group being looked at was confirmed as 13 -19 year olds.

### **3 DETAIL**

- 3.1 Croydon has the highest number of 13-19 year olds in London, about 13% of the population, and should not miss the opportunity to more effectively engage with this significant group of local residents in their formative years. Young people's view of the value of democracy will be informed by the value they see placed on their own views, on those of others, and the use to which these views are actually put. There is already a body of respected research evidence to demonstrate that the involvement of young people in activities/organisations with a social dimension, in which they can develop and make a real contribution, is essential to personal development and positive engagement with society as an adult. It is a strategic mechanism for preventing social exclusion in later life.
- 3.2 The Working Party was mindful of the specific groups of young people who have, or may have, reduced life chances. In working towards its aim of 'a prosperous, safe, healthy and sustainable future for the whole community' the Council has worked with other agencies and put in place various initiatives targeted at specific groups. For example the Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA) targets include improving the education of children and young people in care and all black schoolboys.
- 3.3 The review confirmed that a lot of work is undertaken by very committed staff and volunteers within the Council, notably the Youth Service and Social Services, and by other agencies, not least in the voluntary sector. The Youth Service publishes a Youth Service Directory which lists registered clubs, groups and organisations for young people in Croydon which is really aimed at parents. It is packed with details and shows the a wide range of provision that exists, but we did not find that many of the young people to whom we spoke had seen it.
- 3.4 In looking at the approaches used by Cambridge City Council, the London Borough of Kingston and other authorities, the Working Party became convinced that the best way of providing information and ensuring access to those groups who most need specialist services is to provide a generic focus for all young people which is comprehensive, attractive, kept up to date and provides links to existing and developing services.
- 3.5 In its contact with young people the Working Party was impressed with the concern shown for issues which most adults would share, e.g. crime, the environment and local facilities. It was also apparent that while most of the young people were well informed in many areas, they were keen to have their say, be listened to and wanted to be able to influence decisions that affect their families, friends and themselves. As teenagers they were also keen to meet others and access information on a variety of available activities and on matters relevant to growing up in the modern world, e.g. sexual health and drugs.
- 3.6 It was also clear that although much of the information they said they would like - a 'What's On' in the borough of Croydon and neighbouring areas - was already available, they had not found it. This information is held separately in a variety of formats and locations and is not easily accessible either in terms of being cohesive or in formats attractive to young people.

- 3.7 A point which needs to be borne in mind is that young people do not always live near their secondary schools. Some young people travel into the borough while others travel out. Therefore the school cannot provide information on all the activities that would be local to its students' homes. However schools can facilitate information sharing between pupils.
- 3.8 Those individuals who had attended the Democracy Week event in the Town Hall in October 2002, had expressed some disappointment that there had been no follow up or feed back. At the event itself they had indicated that they found some publicity aimed at their age group patronising, e.g. the posters relating to Graffiti. They had clear views and would have like to have been consulted. Subsequent discussions illustrated that their expectations were neither unrealistic or unreasonable.
- 3.9 Two questionnaires were used in this review. One was sent to 240 young people, 10% of those attaining the age of 18 in the year 2001-2. The return was very low and though the content of the responses was positive, the paper and SAE format was not successful with this age group. Whereas the 160 organisations contacted in a similar way, both in and outside Croydon Council, to ascertain to what extent they seek the views of young people, had 31% response rate. Of these, 88% of the youth focused organisations said they did consult and make use of the information gathered, together with 65% of those which were not youth focused. 100% of these two groups said they plan to continue to consult, indicating they found the process successful and worthwhile.
- 3.10 These results would suggest that many Croydon organisations value the input of young people and act on this where appropriate. Therefore there is knowledge and experience of differing ways of engaging young people in decision making in Croydon, from which the Council and other agencies could learn. Young people are clearly not engaging with existing local consultation initiatives e.g. the Neighbourhood Partnerships. The organisers are concerned that they are not attracting young people. The Working Party believes that a different medium is needed to consult with young people.
- 3.11 Given the role of local authorities in promoting the well-being of their populations and the dismay expressed regarding the low levels of young people participating in elections, any lead that Croydon Council can give in promoting young people's involvement in local decision making, would communicate an unambiguous message that it values Croydon's young people.
- 3.12 At present despite the many initiatives, services and strategies the Council and its partners support, there is no single overarching strategy for all young people. Much of the work undertaken and many Government directed developments are targeted at specific groups of young people.
- 3.13 The overall spend on children and young people, when general education is included, is about half of the Council's total expenditure. While much of this is a statutory requirement this is a huge commitment. The Council could raise the profile of its public image in this regard and positively influence the views of young people.

- 3.14 The need to provide services that are culturally sensitive and equally accessible to all young people does not remove the stigma that those who need services experience and that young people generally perceive. Those young people who need specialist services are less likely to self refer using the more traditional methods e.g. responding to a written notice about services. Acknowledging the existence of this kind of need can confer a lower self image for individuals in this position. Providing information generically which includes links to specialist services should be considered as a way of overcoming stigma. This has proved successful in authorities where this has been tried, e.g. London Borough of Kingston and Cambridge City Council.
- 3.15 Therefore the working party recommended that a Croydon Young People's Website be created. It should be attractive, age appropriate, have links to other information services, personal advice websites and be one click away from the Council's first website page.
- 3.16 If this recommendation is adopted, it will be possible to consult on line after sufficient time has been allowed to enable the level of use to have built up and become consolidated. Having sought the views of young people it is important that decision making across the Council reflects the content of these views. This will publicly demonstrate the Council's commitment to its priorities and provide a model best practice to partners and other organisations.
- 3.17 In local authorities which have begun to consult and directly involve young people, Councillors and officers have reported being pleasantly surprised at the constructiveness of their input. The experience and the process has helped to challenge the negative perceptions held by some young people of adult institutions and democratic processes. Their positive involvement may be helping to change some negative adult perceptions of young people.
- 3.18 Young people do want a separate identity, this is part of being a teenager. They are not a homogenous group but all have hopes, fears and aspirations. They respond more readily to modern methods of communication, e.g. the internet, e-mail and text messaging.
- 3.19 Therefore we recommend that Croydon Council formally adopts the 'Hear By Right' framework which provides an opportunity to assess participation mechanisms so that authorities can work with consultation methods and styles that are appropriate to them. It also recommends that the Council formally adopt the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child - Article 12.

This states:

'Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.'

- 3.21 A list of the Working Party visits and those they consulted are attached as Appendix A. Powerpoint notes which accompany the presentation for this review to the Sub-Committee are attached as Appendix B. Additionally the working party felt that they would be able to contribute to the next Democracy Week event.
- 3.22 The Sub-committee is recommended to timetable follow-up work to monitor the implementation plan, to determine to what extent the agreed recommendations have been implemented.

#### **4 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.1 That the profile of Young People be significantly raised within the borough of Croydon and they be publicly acknowledged as a positive part of our diverse community.
- 4.2 That the Council provide a lead by bringing its departments and community organisations together to provide a clearer focus on young people.
- 4.3 That the Council adopt the 'Hear by Right' framework which provides various models for participation and that meaningful participation with and for young people be established within the Council.
- 4.4 That the Council adopt the United Nations convention on the Rights of the Child - Article 12 which states: "Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law."
- 4.5 That the Council establish an interactive, generic Croydon Young People's Website with links to existing information, services and advice sites provided by departments, partners and other relevant organisations.
- 4.6 That the generic Croydon Young People's Website be developed over time with the active involvement of young people and, when established, that it be used for consultation with young people.
- 4.7 That the links established with schools and other organisations during our brief review be maintained, developed and used in on-going democratic processes.
- 4.8 That the 'Democracy Week' event held in October 2002 be repeated with representatives from participating schools choosing the subject.

- 4.9 That an implementation plan be drawn up to progress accepted recommendations which can be shared with the young people and organisations that gave their time and contributed to this review and the relevant Scrutiny Sub-Committee which will monitor its implementation.

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## Appendix A

The working party met, undertook visits and consulted as follows:

- 25.09.02 First working party meeting at Waddon Youth Centre.
- 11.10.02 Working party half day meeting at Heathfield Training Centre to plan the review and devise a questionnaire for young people.
- 17.10.2 As part of Democracy Week a Young People's Debate was held in the Council Chamber. Some working party members attended and made contacts to assist with the work of the review.
- 07.11.02 Meeting with John Johnson, Schools Inspector to find out more about Citizenship on the National Curriculum and local contacts.
- 19.11.02 Sub-committee meeting - a report was given on the progress of the review including a draft questionnaire.
- 22.11.02 Working party meeting to review progress and work plan.
- 27.11.02 Visit to Bensham Manor School.
- 06.12.02 Visit to Selhurst Boys' School.
- 17.12.02 Meeting with prospective Youth Parliament member.
- 14.01.03 Sub-committee meeting - a further report was given on the progress of the review including a letter and questionnaire sent to 160 local organisations.
- 21.01.03 Visit to Thomas Moore School.
- 22.01.03 Working party meeting with Harry Wade, principal author of 'Hear by Right'.
- 27.01.03 Visit to Connexions.
- 29.01.03 Working party members attended the Children's Fund presentation in the Town Hall.
- 30.01.03 Visit to Kingston Social Services.
- 03.02.03 Working party meeting to discuss findings and recommendations.
- 11.02.03 Visit to Ashburton Community School.
- 25.02.03 Sub-committee meeting to consult on review findings and recommendations.