

## REPORT AND CONCLUSIONS OF THE YOUTH ENGAGEMENT TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Autumn 2016

### 1. Summary

- 1.1 The Youth Engagement Task and Finish Group was established by the Research and Development Committee, following a successful motion at Council in April 2016, to explore ways in which the Council could better engage with, listen to, and inform young people in the Borough.
- 1.2 The terms of reference are set out in *Appendix 1*, along with the membership of the Group.
- 1.3 The Task and Finish Group met six times to consider its approach, survey the Council's current activities, take evidence from individuals and groups, and formulate this report.
- 1.4. It took evidence from the following groups and individuals, as well as from KBC officers.

Emergency Services Cadets	Anne-Marie Lawson
Northamptonshire Police	Inspector Julie Mead and PC Tony White
Kettering Sea Cadets	Marc Pether
Northants Assoc Youth Clubs	Adam Pope
Youth Works	Cindy Wrighting
William Knibb Centre Volunteer	Jordan Bradford
KBC Apprentices	Edward Frost, Eden Palmer, Katy Ayres
East Northamptonshire Council	Shaun Sannerude
South Northamptonshire Council	Emma Faulkner

KBC Staff  
Dave Lane, Mark Redding, Stephen Edwards, Julie Trahern, John Conway, Martin Hammond.

Vicariously, the Group also had reported to it the conclusions of a discussion with the head-teachers of the six secondary schools in the Borough on this issue.

The Group is most grateful for the time and energy given to this research by those people and by KBC staff.

## 2. Conclusions

- 2.1. The Council already does a great deal of work to engage with, involve and support young people in the Borough. (Services directly of relevance to young people are listed in Appendix Two). It was an innovator twenty or more years ago in establishing a Youth Council, and has had a long history of consulting and involving young people in its work. However, now is a good time to take stock, evaluate the long term impact of its approaches to date and identify ways to embed and strengthen its activities in this field.
- 2.2. In the last decade or so, the rise of social media, the challenges faced by voluntary sector organisations to sustain societies, clubs and cadet forces, changes in the approaches taken by schools to pupil engagement and wider community engagement, the decline in public sector resources and a more fragmented society means that what had worked previously may no longer be relevant or effective.
- 2.3. This report is structured into five sections, each dealing with a strand of activities, informed by the evidence given by those presenting to it, and from the Council's historical experience. The recommendations are similarly structured under these five headings:-
  1. Project based initiatives
  2. Consultation Forums
  3. Social Media
  4. Topic based information provision
  5. Engagement with civic leaders, elected members and Council staff and services

## 3. Project Based Initiatives

- 3.1. The Borough Council had a long practice of involving young people in the practical design and delivery of projects which affected them directly. Some of the more recent work had been in relation to:-
  - a) Development, in 2012, of a new play area and outdoor gym for Rockingham Road Pleasure Park, engaging Park Infant and Junior Schools; the design company behind some of the equipment received a Prime Ministerial *Points of Light* award for community engagement, and this set a standard for the Council's policy thereafter.
  - b) Development, in 2014-15, of new play facilities at Grafton Street Park, under the banner *Little Ambassadors*, engaging pupils from St Andrew's School, which had now progressed to a Healthy Eating

Initiative and the Salvage of Outdoor Shelters, to form outdoor classrooms.

- c) Extension of opening times and improved facilities at the Ise Skate Park, during 2016, engaging local users to consult their peers, work with designers, vote on designs and then work with the winning contractor.
  - d) A similar approach to the development of new skate facilities at Rothwell.
  - e) Understanding the needs of homeless young people; KBC and Connexions supported a group of six young people who had personal experience of homelessness who acted as peer researchers, who interviewed a further 24 about their experiences, which led to changes in services, as well as giving the six volunteers new skills.
  - f) Sixth formers from local schools are invited to help with the conduct of election counts, experiencing all aspects of the management of an election.
- 3.2. The purpose of these projects was a combination of improving the quality of the end result, by involving users and those affected, increasing ownership of facilities and improving the skills of the young people involved, in making choices, thinking through problems, understanding different views and potential conflicts, and resolving differences.
- 3.3. The Deputy Head of St Andrew's School spoke at the Council meeting in 2015 when the Little Ambassadors programme was presented to councillors, and suggested that the Council could give support to other schools in the town to carry out similar work in their own communities.
- 3.4. The Task and Finish Group felt that there are clear advantages in engaging with young people on specific projects as there is generally a tangible outcome and young people can see an immediate impact as a result of their involvement.
- 3.5. The Task and Finish Group felt that there are specific areas in which the Council can extend its work with young people on project-based initiatives. These include:
- 3.5.1. Publications – working with council staff on the preparation and publication of information for young people
  - 3.5.2. Building projects – visiting sites periodically and following the development of schemes through the construction phase

- 3.5.3. Environmental Improvement projects – assisting in the design of works, which will help to develop a sense of ownership among young people
- 3.5.4. Museum and art gallery – working with council staff on the planning and mounting of displays and exhibitions
- 3.5.5. Kettering by the Sea and Christmas in the Market Square – helping to plan a programme of events within a tight budget

#### **4. Consultation Forums**

- 4.1 The Council established a Student Council in 1994, which has continued to operate to this day. It provided it with administrative support and a budget of £3000 per annum. It draws its members from the six secondary schools, by election, and latterly, by co-option or election from local youth organisations and some special schools. The elected councillors serve for two years and are aged 13-15 when on the Council. It has a right to present reports to the Council's Executive Committee. Its purpose is to:-
  - a) Provide a forum for young people to be consulted by the Borough Council and other organisations on services, issues and projects
  - b) Enable young people to experience the electoral process and wider democratic principles
  - c) Enable young people to develop projects, or support others' projects or services in the Borough, including using the grant provided to it.
  - d) Enable young people to better understand public services and current issues
  - e) Provide skills for those elected, in debate, making choices, project delivery and financial management
- 4.2. Originally supported by the schools, which facilitated elections to it, and gave members time off school for its meetings to take place in the afternoon, it preceded the establishment of school councils within schools themselves, and has suffered more recently from inconsistent and poor attendance, infrequent elections and schools' reduction in scope to provide the support that was deemed acceptable two decades ago. Head-teachers recognise its declining value, but remain supportive of the overall principle.

- 4.3. Other Councils have established a similar structure, including the County Council. However, the structures at a county wide level appear to have disappeared, as there was no identifiable evidence of their continued existence. East Northamptonshire Council runs an annual conference with pre-determined topics of discussion and this is successful at engaging a good number of young people. They benefit from their local schools providing support, promotional work and time off for this event. South Northamptonshire Council had established a youth council as both a consultative forum and a means of delivering projects; supplemented since 2011 with an annual conference. They too had struggled more recently with attendance and the level of support from schools. Matters discussed at these forums and events ranged from hate crime to road safety awareness, bullying, jobs, planning and environmental crime.
- 4.4. The Sea Cadets, the NAYC, the Emergency Services Cadets and the William Knibb Centre all had some form of forum in place which enabled their service users to express opinions about their organisation, projects, and local issues. Similarly, all secondary schools in the Borough had a School Council made up of pupils.
- 4.5. The choice before the Council is whether it is worth trying to revive the existing Youth Council, changing the nature of its membership and mode of operation, replacing or supplementing what it does, for example by an annual conference, or relying instead on existing forums as a basis for achieving the original objectives as set out in 4.1 above.
- 4.6. The secondary heads have invited the Council to engage with their student councils as an alternative approach, and other groups and associations who gave evidence were happy to provide the same facility. Clearly, this would be more time consuming than supporting a single Council which met 6 times a year, and would abandon the objective around experience of the democratic process, but it would mean a much larger group of young people, and a wider age range of young people could be engaged and involved. It is also an option to reconstruct the Youth Council by inviting representatives from existing school and organisational forums, including, for example, private schools, schools outside the Borough which draw in good numbers of Borough residents, and other groups, to form a more ad hoc but still regular Borough wide forum. This new forum could be invited to consider major issues affecting the Borough, so that, in effect it would have a themed purpose to each gathering.
- 4.7. Other areas have, with varying degrees of success, run annual conferences. Kettering Borough's Local Strategic Partnership also has an annual conference each autumn, so there could be some linkage between the two.

#### 4.8. Conclusions

- 4.8.1. The Council's Youth Council is increasingly difficult to sustain, and it is not alone in that. It is therefore time to abandon it in favour of alternative arrangements.
- 4.8.2. Consultation should be carried out with young people by using existing school and organisational councils and forums, either through paper consultation or by officer/member attendance at them.
- 4.8.3. A Youth Forum should be constructed, inviting each school and organisational council to nominate two of its members to attend an event two or three times a year on selected topics, which have themselves been identified through consultation with young people. The number of participating institutions and societies should be as wide as possible to ensure plurality and diversity, in age, background, experience and gender. The Forum should retain the right to place matters of concern on the agenda of the Council's Executive Committee.
- 4.8.4. The idea of an annual conference be mooted with schools in the Borough, to establish the practicality of permitting time away from school to attend, and that such a conference should feed into the Local Strategic Partnership's own conference and deliberations.
- 4.8.5. The £3000 grant currently available to the Youth Council should be retained, but held in an account, to support initiatives by young people in the Borough.

#### 5. **Social Media**

- 5.1. The pervasive nature of social media as a focus for social interaction, information gathering and the formation of opinion, particularly for young people, means that it was a vital method of communication. The ability to create linkages between events, organisations and opportunities within and outside the Council was under-exploited. The question for the Council is what is the best means of utilising these platforms to engage with, listen to and inform young people? A Council branded social media platform was, most responders told us, highly unlikely to be an attractive place to go for young people, irrespective of how well it was designed and populated. It is unrealistic to expect that young people will want "their" social space to be occupied by a public body of which they know little, and therefore use of the medium should be more subtle than it needs to be for older age groups. In

contrast, however, there was good evidence that young people more readily relate to their neighbourhood, town or village and this may be a fruitful focus when utilising social media.

- 5.2. The Borough Council has a pre-existing Facebook page, a Twitter account and a website with various features for 1-1 communication, but none of this has been designed with young people exclusively in mind. Indeed, together with an online presence for the Council's museum and gallery, the Mayor, and the market Place, 72% of the Council's followers are women aged 25-44 (a large proportion of whom will, of course, be parents of local young people). This would suggest that this remains a viable route to engage young people through family members but not a means of direct communication. The police also had found that more success had been achieved by targeting parents to pass on information to their children.
- 5.3. Most schools have a closed Facebook page for use by students, staff and parents. They would be open to messages from the Council being communicated through this facility. It is likely that this would be a good tool for information giving, publicity for events and services and might be a way of advertising the existence of consultation exercises, or seeking volunteers to get involved in projects.
- 5.4. The County Council has an online consultation platform originally developed by Limehouse, which is used to conduct consultations. This is available to other agencies to use (it was purchased through a partnership fund paid for by local authorities and other public sector bodies). Better use of this could be beneficial but its user base is county wide and it would be more difficult to direct questions at Kettering only residents.
- 5.5. Social media had promoted the phenomenon of opinion formers whose endorsement could significantly affect the profile of a particular issue. Local examples were given of the social media output of the *Johnny's Happy Place* charity and of local clothing brand *Takeover UK*. Connecting with those groups or individual younger people who already had an extensive online presence might be helpful to increasing impact when planning a consultation or project or event.
- 5.6. Conclusions
  - 5.6.1. The Council should aim to make better use of its existing "This is Kettering" Facebook page to communicate opportunities, events and consultations, expecting that this will be an indirect means of communicating with young people through family members, rather than through a peer group.

5.6.2. The Council should not attempt to create a social media presence for itself focused entirely on young people, but should make use of existing institutional closed accounts (such as those which schools operate) with the owners' consent for material which seeks to advertise opportunities, projects, events and consultation events.

5.6.3. The Council should develop appropriate short term micro-sites and/or strengthen that part of its website which gives people the opportunity to express views and opinions and respond to consultation, so that is more easily useable and recognisable, especially by young people.

5.6.4. The Council should seek out potential allies with a high online presence, at the planning stage, in order to secure more coverage for consultation, events or projects.

## **6. Topic based information provision**

6.1. The Task and Finish Group were made aware of various projects to engage young people around specific topics. These included:-

- a) Money management training at Bishop Stopford School, led by Citizens Advice Bureau, aimed at approximately 200 year 12 pupils
- b) Budget management advice at Southfields School, involving a project where students produced and sold goods, aimed at 13-14 year olds, with financial set up costs met by KBC and with charities benefiting from the profits raised
- c) Housing options and homelessness awareness raising, led by KBC, at Buccleuch Academy reaching 1200+ students in lively and interactive sessions in October 2016.

6.2. As previously mentioned, the Council as an institution has relatively little interest for young people on social media. Therefore, information specifically for young people could usefully be targeted at their parents rather than at the young people themselves. Topics which might be particularly useful to treat in this way include:

- Events, sports and leisure activities
- Health and lifestyle
- Training and educational opportunities
- Housing and homelessness
- Money management

6.3. The Kettering Futures Partnership could also play a part in providing information on topics which are relevant to young people that can be accessed by partner agencies. This might include topic sheets containing headline information that can be used by other organisations in their publications.

6.4. Given the success of recent school based topic sessions, all schools should be offered the same facility, and schools invited to identify topics which would best fit in with their curriculum, for either the Council or its partners to provide.

## **7. Engagement with civic leaders, elected members and Council staff and services**

7.1. Many of those giving evidence spoke of the distance between the Council and its leadership, and young people and identified the need for a higher profile for civic and political leaders amongst young people, so as to reinforce both the value, and the values, of the Council with that audience. For the uniformed organisations, this manifested itself as a desire for cadets to take some part in civic ceremonial and civic engagement with local community groups; for all youth organisations, they felt that members and civic leaders could more visibly show interest in the activities of young people/their projects and personal development.

7.2. The work of the Local Strategic Partnership and its annual conference were cited as good examples of current engagement, as was, the work of Kettering Borough Training, and the sports development work the Council undertook, with schools and youth groups. Southfields School students also, for example, recently attended Kettering Carnival with the KBC Social Inclusion Team, as part of their money management project. However, many of these services or initiatives were not widely known amongst young people. Whilst apprentices, for example, spoke highly of KB Training as a provider, especially compared to others, they were critical of its low profile amongst their peers, which undermined its reach.

7.3. The idea of a Mayor's cadet was promoted, as a way of increasing engagement with a wider range of young people. Invitations to open evenings were appreciated by members and it was agreed that it was good for young people to see councillors taking them seriously at events and in their settings. A mechanism to alert members to opportunities to engage (a listings journal for example) would help.

7.4. Reference was made to the occasional use in the past of empty retail units as consultation hubs which young people were more likely to feel

comfortable visiting than the Council offices. The Council also owned a “burger van” type facility which can be used for consultation exercises.

7.5. Conclusions

7.5.1. Future Mayors should appoint a Mayor’s Cadet from one of the uniformed cadet forces to support them during their year of office.

7.5.2. The Council’s Highlights magazine should be expanded to incorporate a listings section, featuring events and programmes involving young people, and members encouraged to attend activities in their ward or area of interest.

7.5.3. A cabinet member should be identified as a young person’s champion, to encourage other members to take an active interest in projects involving young people and help promote access to, awareness of, and availability of services.

7.5.4. Where appropriate, touring facilities or empty retail premises in town centres should be utilised as consultation venues.

7.5.5. The Council should re-examine the marketing of KB Training to increase its profile.

## 8. Summary of Recommendations

### Project based initiatives

1. The Council should continue and extend its practice of involving young people in the design and delivery of facilities and projects, in particular it should
  - a) Seek volunteers to work with council staff on the preparation and publication of information for young people
  - b) Arrange for young people to visit sites periodically and follow the development of schemes through the construction phase
  - c) In relation to environmental improvement projects get young people to assist in the design of works, to develop a sense of ownership among young people
2. Young people should be invited to work with museum and gallery staff on the planning and mounting of displays and exhibitions
3. Young people should be invited to help plan a programme of events within a tight budget in relation to events such as Kettering by the Sea and Christmas in the Market Square

### Consultation Forums

4. The Council's Youth Council is increasingly difficult to sustain, and it is not alone in that. It is therefore time to abandon it in favour of alternative arrangements.
5. Consultation should be carried out with young people by using existing school and organisational councils and forums, either through paper consultation or by officer/member attendance at them.
6. A Youth Forum should be constructed, inviting each school and organisational council to nominate two of its members to attend an event two or three times a year on selected topics, which have themselves been identified through consultation with young people. The number of participating institutions and societies should be as wide as possible to ensure plurality and diversity, in age, background, experience and gender. The Forum should retain the right to place matters of concern on the agenda of the Council's Executive Committee.

7. The idea of an annual conference be mooted with schools in the Borough, to establish the practicality of permitting time away from school to attend, and that such a conference should feed into the Local Strategic Partnership's own conference and deliberations.
8. The £3000 grant currently available to the Youth Council should be retained, but held in an account, to support initiatives by young people in the Borough.

### Social Media

9. The Council should aim to make better use of its existing "This is Kettering" Facebook page to communicate opportunities, events and consultations, expecting that this will be an indirect means of communicating with young people through family members, rather than through a peer group.
10. The Council should not attempt to create a social media presence for itself focused entirely on young people, but should make use of existing institutional closed accounts (such as those which schools operate) with the owners' consent for material which seeks to advertise opportunities, projects, events and consultation events.
11. The Council should develop appropriate short term micro-sites and/or strengthen that part of its website which gives people the opportunity to express views and opinions and respond to consultation, so that is more easily useable and recognisable, especially by young people.
12. The Council should seek out potential allies with a high online presence, at the planning stage, in order to secure more coverage for consultation, events or projects.
13. The Council should more pro-actively use social media to advertise and promote its services, such as apprenticeship opportunities.

### Topic based information provision

14. Information specifically for young people could usefully be targeted at their parents rather than at the young people themselves. Topics which might be particularly useful to treat in this way include:
  - Events, sports and leisure activities
  - Health and lifestyle

- Training and educational opportunities
  - Housing and homelessness
  - Money management
15. The Kettering Futures Partnership could also play a part in providing information on topics which are relevant to young people that can be accessed by partner agencies. This might include topic sheets containing headline information that can be used by other organisations in their publications.
16. Given the success of recent schools based topic sessions, all schools should be offered the same facility, and schools invited to identify topics which would best fit in with their curriculum, for either the Council or its partners to provide.

Engagement with civic leaders, elected members and Council staff and services

17. Future Mayors should appoint a Mayor's Cadet from one of the uniformed cadet forces to support them during their year of office.
18. The Council's Highlights magazine should be expanded to incorporate a listings section, featuring events and programmes involving young people, and members encouraged to attend activities in their ward or area of interest.
19. A cabinet member should be identified as a young person's champion, to encourage other members to take an active interest in projects involving young people and help promote access to, awareness of, and availability of services
20. Where appropriate, touring facilities or empty retail premises in town centres should be utilised as consultation venues
21. The Council should re-examine the marketing of KB Training to increase its profile.

## APPENDIX ONE

### Terms of Reference for Scrutiny Task & Finish Group

#### Youth Engagement

##### Members

Councillor Ash Davies  
Councillor Shirley Lynch  
Councillor Clarke Mitchell  
Councillor Margaret Talbot  
1 vacancy

##### Officers

Martin Hammond  
Julie Trahern  
John Conway  
Steve Edwards  
Such other officers, particularly in public services, corporate and cultural services, housing and customer services, as may be required from time to time

##### Aims

To find ways of effectively engaging with young people in the borough, to better inform public policy making, improve service delivery and engage young people in the democratic process.

##### Objectives

To establish what happens now within KBC to engage young people and to assess how effective that is.

To identify good practice elsewhere

To seek to engage:-

- Schools and colleges, and their own student councils
- Providers of youth services locally and more widely
- Other statutory service providers
- Members of the County-wide Shadow Children's Board and other representatives of young people in the county.

- Young people between the ages of 8-18

in order to find out:-

- What are the best ways of consulting and engaging young people in
  - Service design
  - Project implementation
  - Policy making
- How best to familiarise young people with the democratic process and to interest them in it
- What decision making could be delegated to formally constituted group(s) of young people
- How can we help young people to develop an awareness of the challenges that lie ahead and to develop appropriate life skills
- How can we best share with young people information about the Council's role and activity

**Completion date**

For submission to the Research & Development Committee and then the Executive Committee by late autumn 2016, for consideration

## **APPENDIX TWO**

### **COUNCIL SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES AIMED PRIMARILY AT YOUNG PEOPLE**

#### **Leisure**

Play areas

Summer play schemes

Events – Kettering by the Sea; museum and gallery based participation events etc

Summer sports programme

School sports programme

Skateboarding facilities

Funding of community groups through the Community Fund, and small grants schemes for community based provision

#### **Skills and employment**

Kettering Borough Training - Apprenticeships and Study Programme

#### **Engagement**

Kettering Borough Youth Forum

Funding of youth outreach and personal support and advice services through a service level agreement, and by the Community Safety Partnership