



**Engaging with Children
and Young People
Task Group**

Draft Report

Chairman:

Councillor Andrea Kay

Task Group Members:

Councillor Lady Atkins
Councillor Peter Cartridge
Councillor Emma Ellison
Councillor Terry Lees
Councillor Phil Orme
Councillor Julie Robinson
Councillor Val Wilson
Jess Basquill (Co-opted member)
Shelley Birch (Co-opted member)
Nathan Halford (Co-opted member)

**Overview & Scrutiny Committee
Chairman: Councillor John Ibison**

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Introduction

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers quarterly performance reports about the delivery of the council's Business Plan. It had been noted by the committee that issues relevant to children and young people (hereafter referred to simply as 'young people') were not explicitly included in the Council's Business Plan,

A similar point had previously been made in the Local Government Association's Corporate Peer Challenge feedback report (the Peer Challenge having taken place in Wyre on 14-16 March 2017).

Paragraph 19, page 10, of the report refers specifically to children and young people:

“Consideration could also be given to identifying SMART objectives linked specifically to children and young people as part of the next business plan refresh. The current plan is skewed towards older people and adults given the understandable challenges faced by the borough with an ageing population. At the same time there are key health and wellbeing challenges for younger people, particularly alcohol-specific hospital admissions of under 18s; the council's community safety, parks, licensing and engagement teams will play an important role in tackling this issue.”

While Wyre Council is not a primary provider of services for young people, a role undertaken by Lancashire County Council, the committee took the view that the needs of young people should be more influential in decision-making and steps should be taken to ensure that the voice of young people is heard more loudly.

As a consequence, the committee commissioned a scrutiny review to make recommendations about how the council might engage more effectively with young people.

Aims of review

The aims of the review, as specified in the scoping document (see Appendix 1), were as follows:

- To review the engagement that currently takes place with children and young people
- To review and understand the barriers to effective engagement with children and young people
- To identify areas where the Council can work collaboratively with partners and the community to improve engagement with children and young people in Wyre
- To make recommendations for improvement to the Cabinet

The review process

The task group has interviewed a range of people who are in an informed position to advise about effective engagement with young people. This has included officers from Wyre Council and Lancashire County Council (LCC), LCC's Cabinet member for Children, Young People and Schools, Youth Mayors and representatives from other local organisations that focus on the needs of young people.

The task group took a very early decision to invite the following to attend and contribute to all task group meetings as co-opted members:

Wyre Council's Partnerships Coordinator
The Youth Mayor of Wyre
The Young Mayor of Garstang

The task group was made aware of a report, '*Local Development and Infrastructure*', prepared by Garstang Youth Council in October 2017.

The task group maintained a focus on "engagement with young people" throughout the review, despite the perhaps understandable temptation to question the provision of services for young people in Wyre, which was not within the group's remit.

Summary of evidence provided by Rosie Green (Policy and Performance Manager) and Shelley Birch (Partnerships Coordinator)

Rosie Green, Policy and Engagement Manager, referred to the Local Government Association's publication, *Partnership Approaches to Improving Health Outcomes for Young People*. She also reminded councillors that, at a recent briefing for members, there was evidence that many different methods of engagement with young people were already being used in the borough although, in Ms Green's opinion, it was something that Wyre Council could develop further.

The Local Government Association's corporate peer challenge (see page 3) identified that there was scope to better reflect young people's issues in the council's Business Plan.

The current Youth Mayor, Jess Basquill, has developed a version of the Life in Wyre resident survey for young people, which is likely to be used by the council in the near future.

Shelley Birch, Partnerships Coordinator, has been asked by Fleetwood Town Council to carry out a Youth Aspiration project which, if successful, could be rolled out across the borough.

In response to a comment about not unreasonably raising the expectations of young people which could not be delivered, Ms Green said that an asset-based approach would be taken, with the intention of working with young people to help make things happen – there would be no gifts. This reflects the reality that not all young people want the same things anyway.

Engaging with young people should be an integral part of the role of a councillor. Youth Councils and Youth Forums have potential if they are properly supported. A Youth Conference and the reintroduction of Young People's Question Time would be other options to consider.

Summary of evidence provided by Jess Basquill (Youth Mayor of Wyre) and Nathan Halford (Young Mayor of Garstang)

Jess Basquill expressed some concern that Lancashire County Council (LCC) appeared to be reducing their provision for young people and were considering terminating their support for the Youth Council.

Nathan Halford said that Garstang needed more consultation about the provision of recreational facilities for young people.

Jess Basquill has devised an equivalent Life in Wyre resident survey specifically for young people, which is entitled 'Your Life Your Survey'. It is hoped that the survey will be available online in early 2018.

The task group expressed their concern about the possible demise of the Youth Council.

Both Jess Basquill and Nathan Halford made it very clear that the various social media were the primary vehicles for effective engagement with young people. Age is relevant to the platform used, statistics showing that young people have a clear preference for Instagram and Snapchat. There would be significant benefits if the council were to develop a website page specifically for young people. This could be considered as a possible recommendation for the task group.

Summary of evidence provided by County Councillor Susie Charles (Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Schools) and Brendan Lee (Head of Service Special Educational Needs and Disability), Lancashire County Council

Lancashire County Council (LCC) has a number of different engagement strategies, some of which relate to the provision of services and some which do not.

It is important to be mindful of the reason for engagement. LCC tends to engage with particular cohorts of young people for a specific purpose, e.g. children in foster care. There is a myriad of different engagement initiatives and events run by LCC.

There are quarterly meetings between the Cabinet and the Youth Council, the latter setting the agenda. The Youth Council is invited to the Cabinet's budget meeting to present their own budget for the coming year.

During 2017 a group of young people made a video about their views and perceptions of social workers which would be used for social worker training in the future.

Mr Lee and CC Charles responded to a number of other questions from task group members about the youth service, wellbeing services, exclusions from school, apprenticeships and the future of the Youth Council.

Although LCC engages with many cohorts of young people very readily, there remain many young people who are not identified as part of a cohort who are much harder to reach. This is the real challenge of effective engagement.

Integrating young people more in the life and activity of local communities remains an objective for LCC. Within this context Mr Lee confirmed that LCC would be willing to allocate some staff time to the development of a library-based community hub.

Summary of evidence provided by Liesl Hadgraft, Head of Business Support

Wyre Council is engaged in the provision of employment opportunities for young people in several different ways.

Work experience is offered, unpaid, usually for a period of two weeks. It is facilitated via the Lancashire Education Business Partnership, who approach the council for work experience placements on behalf of local schools (including Rossall, Millfield and St Aidens, as examples). Individuals will have expressed an interest in a particular area of work – IT and office work are popular choices – and can then be offered a two-week placement to gain some introductory experience of working in an office-based environment.

Links have been established with Blackpool and Fylde College. The council has previously been involved in a mentoring programme and for the past three years has provided Internships to students for a four-week period during the summer holidays. The council identifies the areas of work, for which students will have to apply and go through a full recruitment process, including an interview, in order to gain experience. Internships are paid, funded by the council. In all cases work is specifically identified for the Interns so that it provides value both to the young person and to the council.

A volunteering programme has recently been set up within which the council works with students from Blackpool and Fylde College. The grounds maintenance team has also worked with the Prince's Trust to provide placements.

The experience gained by a young person coming to work at Wyre is inevitably very limited. They usually only get experience of one work area. The placement also needs to be of value to the council so a broader or more flexible placement primarily for the benefit of the young person cannot be provided.

Looking to the future, a more extensive audience of young people could be involved by councillors going out to schools and generating a discussion about the role and responsibilities of the council and what it does. PSHE lessons could also be encouraged to incorporate aspects of public service, rather than waiting for young people to express an interest in something that they know relatively little about. Young people who have worked at the council on placement might be invited to accompany councillors on visits to schools to deliver the message jointly, in order to make it easier for young people to receive and understand. Young people generally prefer to receive information and advice from other young people.

The council needs to consider three key questions:

- (i) How is the council informed about the views of young people?
- (ii) How can these views impact on what the council does?
- (iii) How can young people be better informed about and involved in the democratic processes of local government?

Summary of evidence provided by Debbie Nolan Plunkett (Children's Services Manager) Barnardo's

Barnardo's engages with young people in a variety of different ways. From the organisation's considerable experience of engagement, the following points were made:

- Young people often have very similar views to adults, perhaps surprisingly;
- Young people view subjects such as the environment, flooding and poverty as priorities;
- A section of the council's website that is specifically dedicated to young people would be beneficial;
- Engagement using social media should be maximised;
- Options for involving young people at Full Council meetings should be explored;
- Consideration should be given to setting up a Youth Council for Wyre;
- A Youth Council should have direct links to Full Council;
- Engagement with young people often focused on secondary school students; there is scope to improve links with primary schools, which they would welcome;
- Information provided to schools about democracy should be reviewed and developed

Summary of evidence provided by Nina Beavers (Operations Manager) and Chris Smith (Youth Worker) UR Potential

A Youth Volunteering Project for 10 – 25 year olds has been run by UR Potential for three years, which has recently been extended by a further three years following a successful bid for Lottery funding. 60% of young people referred to the project have additional needs, many of which are linked to mental health.

UR Potential coordinate the Blackpool Youth Council, which has been very successful.

The 'Getting Wyred into Health' consultation (October 2017), which was commissioned by Wyre Council, sought to identify the issues and challenges that young people face in relation to their health and wellbeing. It was coordinated through schools and youth groups and attracted responses from 2,454 young people. The top nine issues/challenges identified, in order, were:

1. Improving mental health and relieving stress (727 votes)
2. Eradicating bullying and exploring internet safety (372)
3. Stop smoking (333)
4. Good sexual health education (251)
5. Physical health and weight management (246)
6. Other (ranging from eating disorders to accidental injury (245)
7. Substance misuse (186)
8. Reducing drinking (51)
9. Oral health (43)

The following recommendations were made:

- i. Improve communication between services and young people
- ii. Improve access to information
- iii. Make information about services easier to find on the internet
- iv. Make clearer what services there already are
- v. Develop more peer to peer schemes
- vi. Provide more opportunities for young people to listen to each other rather than to adults
- vii. Give young people ownership of projects
- viii. Involve young people in the training of staff

Specific recommendations were made for the top three issues identified (mental health, bullying and stopping smoking):

Three additional points, specific to local authorities, were made:

- 1 Councils typically do not respond to issues quickly enough; they need to be more agile/nimble
- 2 Young people need to be involved in discussing and deciding what needs to change
- 3 It is important to ensure that all council services are accessible to people with mental health issues

Conclusions

- 1) Although the council does its best to engage effectively with young people there is clearly room for further development, as highlighted by the LGA's Corporate Peer Review report (2017).
- 2) There are a number of different ways in which the voice of young people could be heard including, a Youth Council, Youth Forums, Young People's Question Time and a Youth Conference.
- 3) It would be desirable to involve young people directly in meetings of the Full Council.
- 4) There is scope for the council to work more closely with other organisations to improve the way in which the council engages with young people.
- 5) The use of social media is the primary way in which effective engagement with young people can be facilitated.
- 6) The council's website does not attract young people to look at it and has no dedicated page(s) for young people.
- 7) Young people generally prefer to receive information and advice from other young people rather than from adults.
- 8) There is scope for councillors to further develop their relationships with schools, including primary schools.

Recommendations

The task group values the role played by the Youth Council, currently supported and coordinated by Lancashire County Council (LCC), and is concerned that, with continuing pressure on council budgets, the current arrangement might not be sustained. In the event of the withdrawal of funding for the Youth Council, the task group would like an alternative to be put in place which would ensure that the voice and involvement of young people in Wyre is continued.

RECOMMENDATION ONE

That, in the case of the demise of the current LCC Youth Council, options be explored in relation to the setting up of a Wyre Youth Council. All High Schools in Wyre should be invited to take part and arrangements should be made to ensure the inclusion of the members of the current Youth Council.

RECOMMENDATION TWO

That options, including digital options, be explored by any future Wyre Youth Council, for other mechanisms by which Wyre Council can engage directly with children and young people (e.g. Youth Forums, Young People's Question Time, Youth Conference).

RECOMMENDATION THREE

That the Council continues to develop closer working relationships with other organisations to facilitate the Council's engagement with young people.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR

That a section dedicated to children and young people be set up on the Council's website.

Task Group Members' attendances

There were five meetings of the task group.

Name	Meetings attended (maximum 5)
Councillor Lady Atkins	2
Councillor Cartridge	1
Councillor Ellison	2
Councillor Kay	5
Councillor Lees	2
Councillor Orme	5
Councillor Robinson	3
Councillor Wilson	3
Jess Basquill (co-opted)	3
Shelley Birch (co-opted)	5
Nathan Halford (co-opted)	2

List of Appendices

Appendix 1 Engaging with Children and Young People Task Group –
Scoping Document – FINAL

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Task Group – Engaging with children and young people

Scoping Document - FINAL

Review Topic	Engaging more effectively with children and young people in Wyre	
Chairman	Councillor Andrea Kay	
Group Membership	Councillors Lady Atkins, Emma Ellison, Kerry Jones, Terry Lees (Vice Chairman), Lesley McKay, Phil Orme, Julie Robinson and Val Wilson	
Officer Support	Peter Foulsham, Scrutiny Officer	
Purpose of the Review	To identify the ways in which the council can engage more effectively with children and young people in the future	
Role of Overview and Scrutiny in this Review (mark all that apply)	Holding Executive to account – decisions <input type="checkbox"/> Existing budget and policy framework <input type="checkbox"/> Contribution to policy development <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Holding Executive to account – performance <input type="checkbox"/> Community champion <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Statutory duties / compliance with codes of practice <input type="checkbox"/>	
Aims of Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ To review the engagement that currently takes place with children and young people ○ To review and understand the barriers to effective engagement with children and young people ○ To identify areas where the Council can work collaboratively with partners and the community to improve engagement with children and young people in Wyre ○ To make recommendations for improvement to the Cabinet 	
Methodology	Consideration of documents, reports and performance statistics Interviewing witnesses at task group meetings Reviewing and comparing the methods for engagement with children and young people used by other local authorities	

Scope of Review	The review is limited to consideration of how the council might make its engagement with children and young people more effective.
Potential Witnesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Health and Engagement Portfolio Holder ○ Lead Member for Children and Young People ○ Service Director Health and Wellbeing ○ Service Director Performance and Innovation ○ Partnerships and Engagement Officer ○ Youth Mayor – Wyre Council ○ Fylde Coast YMCA ○ Locality Manager Wellbeing Prevention and Early Help, LCC ○ Locality Manager LCC Children’s Services ○ Commissioning Managers, NHS Fylde and Wyre CCG ○ Public Health, LCC ○ Regenda Housing Group
Documents to be considered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Wyre Council Business Plan (2017 Update) ○ Lancashire Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Transformation Plan ○ Lancashire Children and Young People Plan 2014-2017 ○ Wyre Health Profile ○ Lancashire (Wyre) Joint Strategic Needs Assessment ○ LGA Peer Challenge Report (2017)
Risks	
Level of Publicity	Low
Indicators of a Successful Review	The implementation and delivery of appropriate, new and collaborative children’s and young people’s activity on the Business Plan
Intended Outcomes	Better outcomes for children and young people in Wyre (as reflected in statistics for, amongst other indicators, health and wellbeing, infant mortality, obesity, mental health, abuse, self-harm, education and employment).
Approximate Timeframe	3 months
Projected Start Date	October 2017

Revised 3 April 2018