



THE YOUTH COUNCIL

**COUNCILLOR BRENDA THOMPSON
EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LEARNING**

GILL ROLLINGS DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LEARNING

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PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. To consider proposals to provide the Youth Council with opportunities to participate in the Council's decision making processes together with the promotion of those processes with young people.

BACKGROUND AND EXTERNAL CONSULTATION

2. The 2007/08 Children and Young People's Plan, under the Every Child Matters outcome of 'Making a Positive Contribution', indicates that children and young people represent the next generation of citizens who will help shape the future of Middlesbrough. A challenge within the Plan is to create innovative ways of involving young people, in a meaningful way, so that they can add value to their local community and become active and participating citizens of Middlesbrough.
3. Similar challenges are also reflected by a number of national and local drivers such as the development of the citizenship curriculum within schools; the Mayor's youth agenda; Scrutiny recommendations, endorsed by the Executive, to develop ways for greater involvement and engagement with young people; and the Local Democracy Week and beyond project.
4. This report therefore examines how these challenges might be built upon by providing new opportunities for young people to become more involved in the Council's decision-making processes. There is also a range of existing opportunities which should not be overlooked and these are also covered.

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5. Although the Council involves and consults children and young people on a range of issues through a number of mechanisms, currently there is no framework to formally engage them in the key decision making processes of the Council.
6. In seeking to build on existing mechanisms, rather than creating new ones, there are a number of advantages in the Council working with an existing and representative group of young people.
7. One such group is the Youth Council, the development of which arose from a number of factors. These included views expressed by young people, who had attended various debates, to establish some form of council and recommendations arising from inspection reports. As part of the subsequent process in establishing the Council, nominations were sought from across Middlesbrough and included schools, youth centres, voluntary sector groups and disadvantaged groups.
8. The Youth Council, which held its first meeting in July 2006, is supported by the Youth Service and currently meets on a monthly basis in the Town Hall. It has a membership of 50 young people covering the age range 13 to 19. The Young Persons' champion, elected by young people, also attends most meetings.
9. Whilst the Youth Council does meet to discuss a range of issues and has invited both officers and Members to its meetings (see below), it currently has no formal link to the Council and its decision-making processes.
10. In seeking to develop that link, the report covers three areas, details of which are provided below.

a) Ad Hoc Issues

11. Officers, partners and Members have attended meetings of the Youth Council to give presentations and obtain feedback. Examples of this include the consultation undertaken by the Director of Resources and the Executive Member for Resources on the Council's proposed budget for 2007/08; a debate held with Councillor Dunne on knife crime; and the Police seeking its views on 'stop and search'.
12. Whilst it is the responsibility of the Youth Council to determine its own agenda, the Executive might feel that there are opportunities to develop consultative links with the Youth Council on issues relevant to children and young people. It is therefore suggested that Departments build into their planning processes the option of requesting the Youth Council to consider such issues.

13. An exercise to raise awareness with Members would also be undertaken to ensure that they had the same opportunities to make similar requests.
14. It is further suggested that in order to avoid over burdening the Youth Council, that a limit of one such request, with the agreement of the chair of the Youth Council, be placed on each Youth Council agenda.

b) Scrutiny

15. A key part of the Council's decision-making process is the review and/or development of either existing or new Council policies. A significant amount of this work is undertaken by Scrutiny and based on current records, over 90% of all scrutiny recommendations are supported and implemented by the Executive. In supporting Scrutiny to undertake this important work, a number of well established and acknowledged working practices have been developed including the links into the Executive decision making process.
16. In order for the Youth Council to link into established and recognised decision making frameworks, rather than creating new ones, it is suggested that this could be achieved through the scrutiny process.
17. The overall aim would be, subject to certain conditions, for the Youth Council to undertake a limited number of scrutiny investigations on specific topics and use, where possible and appropriate, the practices and techniques followed by the Council's own Scrutiny Panels and Board. A key issue would be the provision of Council support and advice to assist the Youth Council in its work.
18. In establishing the Youth Council scrutiny arrangements, the following is proposed:
 - as the Youth Council has a large membership, it be requested to establish ad hoc scrutiny panels for each scrutiny topic identified;
 - the appointments process to the panels be a matter for the Youth Council;
 - that the practices and techniques followed by the Council's Scrutiny Panels and Board be used as a basis by the Youth Council in developing its own procedures when investigating a topic, with guidance, in establishing those procedures, also being provided by the Council's Scrutiny Team; and
 - at the conclusion of each investigation, the panel produce a final report which is then fed through the decision making process. Using the existing Council framework, this would include:

Final Report of the **Youth Council Panel** presented to
Youth Council (YC).

Presentation of YC report to relevant **Scrutiny Panel**
(The Panel can ask for the report to be referred back to the Youth Council
if it considers that further issues need addressing).

Presentation of Panel and YC reports to **OSB**. YC
representatives invited.

Presentation of Panel and YC reports (and any service response) to
Executive. YC representatives invited.

19. It will be necessary to establish more detailed working protocols for these arrangements. It is suggested that they be drafted jointly between officers and Youth Council representatives with the Director of Children, Families and Learning having the final authority to approve them. The working protocols would also need to cover the issues detailed below.

Establishing a Work Programme

- Due to Council capacity issues, the number of topics for investigation to be supported by these provisions, would be up to a maximum of three per year and that they be undertaken on a consecutive, rather than concurrent, basis.
- The Youth Council to agree its own work programme.

Providing Council Support

- That the Youth Council Panel, prior to investigating a topic, be provided with in house training by the Council's Scrutiny Team.
- Whilst the Youth Council Panel would need to be mindful of existing Council workloads, officers, where possible, should seek to respond positively to reasonable requests made by the Panel for information, guidance and attendance at meetings. When requests require further clarification, they be directed to the relevant Head of Service for determination.
- Meeting room facilities to be offered free of charge at the Town Hall.
- The Youth Service provide the day to day administrative support.
- The support arrangements be reviewed after the first year of operation.

Oversight by Head of Service

- If wider issues arise on the working and support arrangements with the Council that require clarification, the Head of the Youth Service be authorised to deal with such matters following consultation with the relevant Head of Service.

c) Raising Awareness of Democratic Process

20. There already exists a number of opportunities for members of the public to access a range of information on the decision-making processes. This would include, for example, the Executive forward work programme; attending Member meetings open to the public such as the Executive and Scrutiny; and access to reports considered at those meetings.
21. If young people are to be given opportunities for greater participation in decision making processes, then it is important that they both understand and are aware of their rights as citizens.
22. It is therefore suggested that a young persons' guide on their local democratic rights be produced which would also include details on the Youth Opportunities Fund. In order to make it user friendly, it is proposed to produce the guide in consultation with representatives of the Youth Council. It would also be promoted widely through, for example, youth clubs and groups and schools.

FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND WARD IMPLICATIONS

23. **Financial** – Whilst there are some relatively minor financial implications arising from the report that can be met through existing resources, the report does contain a commitment for officers to support the new arrangements. Safeguards have however been included such as an upper limit on the number of investigations to take place and a review of the arrangements after one year.
24. **Ward Implications** –The report is of interest to all Members
25. **Legal Implications** – There are no legal implications.

CONSULTATION

26. It is proposed for this report to be also submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Board and the Youth Council in order to seek their views.

RECOMMENDATIONS

27. The Executive is asked to approve:
- a) the proposals detailed within the report in respect of the ad hoc consultation arrangements; the scrutiny framework; and production of a young persons' guide; and
 - b) that the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Board and the Youth Council be sought and the Director of Children, Families and Learning be authorised to deal with any matters that might arise, following consultation with the Executive Member for Children, Families and Learning.

REASONS

28. The proposals all seek to promote greater engagement of children and young people in Council's decision-making processes, which also reflect a number of national and local drivers.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

29. No background papers were used in the preparation of this report

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