



# A councillor's workbook on engaging with young people



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# Introduction

This workbook has been designed as a learning aid for councillors to assist them with the effective engagement of young people and the organisations representing them within their ward. The workbook provides some signposting and ideas around the engagement of young people rather than it being a step by step guide as such. Like so many areas of modern life, the methods of communication, the fora with which young people engage and the organisations representing them are often much more fluid and dynamic than for other aspects of the population. Developments in social media and the technology used by young people are ever changing, and risk being out of date as soon as they are captured in print. So this workbook is intended to highlight some key approaches and options around effective engagement for you in your role or roles as a councillor. The key requirement is to think about the issues presented and how the material relates to you, your council and the young people you serve and represent.

## Why engage with young people?

As a local councillor, you represent everyone living in your ward – and across the UK, nearly two in 10 people are under 16. Having a good experience growing up gives children a much better chance of making a positive transition to adulthood and reaching their potential; by listening to and acting on their concerns and supporting them to shape their community, you can strengthen your community going forward.

Engaging young people also gives them a better understanding of local democratic processes, and if they see changes made as a result of their participation, they are more likely to remain engaged later in life. Taking the time to involve young people in decision-making is a great way of developing the citizens and leaders of the future.

## Using this workbook

Throughout the workbook you will encounter a number of features designed to help you think about working with young people. These features are represented by the symbols shown below:



**Guidance** – this is used to indicate research, quotations, explanations and definitions that you may find helpful.



**Challenges** – these are questions or queries raised in the text which ask you to reflect on your role or approach – in essence, they are designed to be thought-provokers.



**Case studies** – these are ‘pen pictures’ of approaches used by other people or organisations.



**Hints and tips** – these represent a selection of good practices which you may find useful.



**Useful links** – these are signposts to sources of further information and support, outside of the workbook, which may help with principles, processes, methods and approaches.

A full list of useful additional information and support is also set out in the Appendix of the workbook.

# Youth participation



## Defining youth participation

'Participation Works', is a partnership of six national children and young people's agencies that enable organisations to effectively involve children and young people in the development, delivery and evaluation of services that affect their lives. It defines youth participation in the following terms:

"Participation is a fundamental part of citizenship. It is the process by which children and young people can influence decision-making which affects their lives to bring about positive change. "Participation is not solely the act of expressing an opinion and having that opinion taken seriously, but of being able to construct that opinion freely through accessing information and meeting and debating with others".

The Participation Works website is a good place to start when you are looking for more detailed information on how to involve and engage young people.  
[www.participationworks.org.uk/](http://www.participationworks.org.uk/)

In the resource section of their website there is also a series of 'How to guides' which present practical approaches to inclusion in different work areas.  
[www.participationworks.org.uk/resources/](http://www.participationworks.org.uk/resources/)

## Defining 'youth'

For the purposes of providing services, legislation defines 'young people' as those aged 13 to 19, or up to 25 for those with a learning difficulty. However it's important to engage with young people as early as possible to get their views and to start to nurture an interest in the democratic process, so this workbook will look at engagement from primary school upwards.

## Meaningful democratic engagement

Young people should have access to a range of activities as part of local youth engagement – from voting in elections to engaging in consultation and service design to participating in civic life.

As a community leader, you are ideally placed to understand the particular challenges faced by your residents, including young people. Councillors can support young people to participate in society – from shaping services to be delivered differently and helping to make decisions, right through to supporting social action where young people have changed their area for the better.



## Case study Kirklees Council and National Citizen Service

Martin Green, Head of Localities Offer (Children & Families) at Kirklees Council, talks about the growing partnership with National Citizen Service (NCS).

“The partnership between the council and NCS came about as a result of a discussion between NCS Trust colleagues and the council’s chief executive.

The discussion highlighted mutual aspirations for the role of NCS in the district; particularly around community cohesion, increasing participation and social mobility, improved employability skills and aspirations, active citizenship and efforts to renew democracy and the role of elected members for the 21st Century.

In Kirklees, we have helped facilitate discussions with partners about how we engage, support and challenge young people to commit to social action and active citizenship, including the challenges of how more vulnerable young people can get involved.”

Specific successes during the partnership include:

- providing logistical and resource support to local delivery partners.
- identifying new social action partners and projects
- delivering direct input around democracy for NCS participants in phase two
- engaging a wide range of stakeholders to strategically and operationally develop NCS for the future
- engaging colleagues working directly with more vulnerable young people to plan future participation
- recruiting ‘Dragon’s Den’ participants from across the council

- providing NCS briefings to elected members
- encouraging senior officer and elected members to become ‘NCS champions’
- commissioning research to explore young people’s views on NCS.

We are hopeful that the long-term ambitions will extend beyond the immediate innovation programme and the council will continue to develop its partnership with NCS to:

- maximise the positive contributions, skills and experience of young people through their participation
- provide activities which have direct links to community issues and democratic engagement
- encourage young people to contribute positively within the district after completion
- increase participation on NCS, with a target of 60 per cent of all eligible young people participating by 2020
- integrate the NCS programme into council and partner key strategies and support the delivery of shared outcomes.

Meaningful youth participation happens when young people are treated as equal actors in local decision-making and involved from the start of the process. Tokenism (when young people appear to be given a chance to be represented, but have little choice about how they participate and have limited or no influence in decision-making) is detrimental to youth engagement – and can put people off of taking part in future attempts.



## Hints and tips

- Involve young people from the earliest possible stage of any initiative
- Make sure young people understand what the project or process is about, what it's for, who is making the final decision and what influence they can have. Work with young people to establish ground rules at the beginning.
- Guarantee that all young people will be treated with equal respect.
- Remember that participation is voluntary – young people can choose to disengage at any point.
- Make sure you've considered the needs of young people with special educational needs or disabilities.
- Give young people feedback on what changes as a result of their input.

Existing networks are a good place to start when you're looking to engage with young people in your area. You may know about some of these already as part of your role as a community leader, and it's worth speaking with your council, schools and local housing associations to find out what else is going on. Youth workers and your children's services departments may also be able to help you with ways to engage with young people who aren't part of these existing networks.

Different young people in your area will have different priorities – remember that what is important to one may not matter so much to another, which is why it's important that you try to engage with a range of young people. Seek to understand the varied issues facing young people in your area through existing data (including anecdotal information), and the different ways they are currently involved with the local community, to help you start or build a meaningful dialogue with young people.

## Safeguarding

Make sure you're aware of your council's safeguarding procedures when engaging with young people. These are there to protect both you and young people. Make sure that any engagement is planned so that you can check you're following procedures – whether that's attending a meeting of a local group, or organising your own event. While it might seem easier to speak ad hoc to young people in the community, this doesn't give you time to make arrangements for different needs or to get parental consent, among other considerations.

You also have a role as a community leader to look out for the safety of your younger constituents. The LGA produces guides on issues such as modern slavery and child sexual exploitation to help to spot the warning signs that someone may be at risk. Speak to your member support team if you're interested in training on these issues.

If you're not sure about something, it's always best to check with your council's safeguarding lead.



# Ways to engage



## Hints and tips

### Face to face

Consider engagement mechanisms such as youth clubs, sports club and organisations like the Scouts, Guides and the National Citizen Service. Many youth organisations actively promote engagement in politics or citizenship, which is a good entry point for you to explain your role and let young people know how they can engage with you. Girlguiding UK undertakes an annual Girl's Attitudes Survey which examines a wealth of evidence about girl's lives. This provides valuable insight into the issues and concerns affecting girls and young women. The Scout Association often takes part in sessions around the major party conferences and campaigns around issues such as community engagement, environmental issues, equality and diversity.

Are your local surgeries child- and young people-friendly? Or are they held in school time and limited to those of voting age? You can also consider online Q&A sessions in addition to more traditional surgeries. Your council's communications team will be able to help you if you'd like to look at these options.

If your authority is a children's services authority, you may also have a children in care council. As a corporate parent, you should be listening to and advocating for children in care in your area, and this is a good starting point to understand their concerns.

### Schools

Many schools like to invite local politicians into the school for assemblies or Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) lessons to help students understand about local democracy. Let your local school(s) know if you'd be happy to do this so that they can bear you in mind when planning their curriculum.

### Universities/colleges

University outreach programmes or careers fairs might be an option to start conversations with young adults who might be interested in becoming a local councillor or pursuing a career in politics. Universities may also have political associations and clubs that you can engage with.

### Digital

Social media is a great way to engage not only younger residents but your community as a whole. There are lots of types of social media, all of which have different users and different ways of engaging. Speak with your communications team to see which would be the best for what you hope to achieve – they can also let you know about any council guidelines for social media use.

If you are going to have one or more social media profiles, make sure you update it regularly and engage with your residents in a proactive, rather than reactive, way so that residents can see what you are doing as a community leader.

If you have a website, keep this up-to-date and consider whether it's engaging for young people. Is it clear what your priorities are, what you're doing for your community and how people can get involved in what you're doing?

## Types of engagement

There are lots of different ways to engage young people – from listening events and youth forums, to training youth commissioners and devolving budgets to groups of young people. The best way to engage will depend on what you're trying to achieve – speak with your communications team and community and youth workers to get advice on what would work best.

### **Using the data available for your ward**

Some council community profile data is available down to a ward level and can act as a good indicator for issues that may be affecting young people in your local area.



# Youth representative structures

## Structures and support

There is a range of youth representative structures and organisations that involve young people in democracy, either through direct representation or supporting them to engage in local democratic processes. Find out how these are operating in your area and speak to them to see how you can engage with them to make sure you're listening to and representing young people.

## UK Youth Parliament

The UK Youth Parliament provides opportunities for 11-18 year olds to use their voice to bring about social change through meaningful representation and campaigning.

Members of Youth Parliament (MYPs) are elected annually in every part of the UK, with schools and colleges encouraged to register as polling stations to give young people the chance to experience voting. Once elected, MYPs meet with MPs and local councillors, organise events, run campaigns, make speeches, hold debates and ensure the views of young people are listened to by decision makers.

[www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk](http://www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk)

## British Youth Council

The BYC's mission is to empower young people aged 25 and under to influence and inform the decisions that affect their lives. They encourage young people to get involved in their communities and democracy locally, nationally and internationally, making a difference as volunteers, campaigners, decision-makers and leaders.

The BYC runs a number of youth-led programmes to support this aim, including the UK Youth Parliament, the Young Mayor Network and the Youth Select Committee.

[www.byc.org.uk](http://www.byc.org.uk)

## My Life, My Say

My Life, My Say is a youth-led, national, non-partisan movement that aims to remove the barriers that prevent young people from taking part in decision-making processes, and to 'secure a better Brexit for young people'. It engages young people through a range of innovative techniques and engagement events

[www.mylifemysay.org.uk](http://www.mylifemysay.org.uk)

## Shout Out UK

Shout Out UK is a youth network that gets more young people engaged in politics by providing political literacy education and a platform for young people to share ideas and voice opinions.

[www.shoutoutuk.org](http://www.shoutoutuk.org)

## Bite the Ballot

Bite the Ballot specialises in civic and community engagement, running workshops and events to introduce people to politics and provoke debates within a safe space to help people understand how politics is relevant to them.

[www.bitetheballot.co.uk](http://www.bitetheballot.co.uk)



## Challenge 1 – who have I engaged with?

Consider how you have engaged with the young people in your ward to learn about the issues that they face, and how can you improve this.

What groups have I spoken to and which groups are missing?	What issues did they raise?	What can I do to engage with them better?

# Barriers to engagement

There is concern about the lack of interest involvement of young people in elections over recent years, though we know that there was increased interest (and potentially turnout) from young people in the 2017 General Election compared to the 2015 election.

Some barriers to voting in local elections for young people might echo the reasons other age groups do not vote in large numbers, including feeling uninformed about choices and being too busy on election day to vote.

However, for young people this may be exacerbated by feelings of disillusionment, that it doesn't matter who wins, that politics is 'not for young people' or a lack of understanding about how government works.

Consider how you can encourage young people to engage – for example, by focusing on issues rather than party politics, making decision-making processes clear, and demonstrating the impact young people can have when they take part in local democracy.



## Missing millions report

In 2014 it was estimated that up to 7.5 million eligible voters were missing from the electoral register. The gap between those who are eligible to vote – and those who have their names on the electoral register – is considered to be growing. At the same time, there is growing evidence of a gap emerging between large sections of society and their levels of trust in politicians, political institutions and political processes. The missing millions report looks at the issues around democratic inequality and how the various stakeholders in the political process can look at making positive changes outside the legislative process.

[https://tobysjamesdotcom.files.wordpress.com/2013/11/getting-the-e28098missing-millions\\_-on-to-the-electoral-register-report-appg-on-democratic-participation-bite-the-ballot-dr-toby-james-clearview-research-2016-1.pdf](https://tobysjamesdotcom.files.wordpress.com/2013/11/getting-the-e28098missing-millions_-on-to-the-electoral-register-report-appg-on-democratic-participation-bite-the-ballot-dr-toby-james-clearview-research-2016-1.pdf)

However, lessons can be learnt from the information that increasing numbers of young people under the age of 18 are voting in local youth council, young mayor and youth parliament elections



## Challenge 2 – creating meaningful participation

- What have you done to enable young people to meaningfully engage in local government?
- What barriers have you seen to effective participation in your area?
- What are you going to do to let young people know what actions you've taken as a result of their engagement?
- What ideas do you have about enhancing the dialogue between representatives and young people in your area?

## Youth democracy in action

Recently there have been some good examples of involving young people more effectively in the democratic process. In the case of the Scottish independence referendum of 2014, the decision was taken to lower the voting age from 18 to 16. The case study below looks at the results of that decision and its potential effects on youth engagement.



## Scottish independence referendum

In the Scottish independence referendum of 2014, 16 and 17 year olds were entitled to vote, for the first time in any election in the UK. Advocates of the reform argued that it would help to engage younger people in the political process, setting the stage for greater engagement in democracy over future electoral cycles. On the other hand, critics suggested that 16 and 17 year olds weren't ready for the responsibility that comes with voting.

A study from Democratic Audit UK found that the turnout in the referendum was 85 per cent with over 90 per cent of the eligible population having registered to vote. It is estimated that 66 per cent of 16 and 17 year olds registered to vote, and 75 per cent of those were calculated to have turned out.

These figures represent a considerable improvement on the percentage voting in the UK general elections that have taken place since 2000, where the turnout had not reached 70 per cent of the eligible electorate. The figures also dwarf those recorded for all of the Scottish Parliament elections since 1999, while the only post-World War 2 UK elections that had comparable voting figures were the 1950 and 1951 UK general elections.

Key conclusions from the Democratic Audit UK study include:

- 75 per cent of the general youth public was interested in politics before the referendum
- around 73 per cent of the general youth public said that the referendum has increased their interest in politics a lot
- compared to the pre-referendum period, the proportion of young members of the public who actively campaigned on behalf of a campaign group increased tenfold

- the proportion of young members of the public who are members of a political party quadrupled following the referendum campaign
- since the referendum, around 44 per cent of young members of the public reported that their use of social media to discuss political issues had increased..

69 per cent of members of the public (and 75 per cent of MSYPs) reported that their use of social media to discuss political issues increased during the referendum campaign. Since the referendum, around 44 per cent of young members of the public (and around 39 per cent of MSYPs) report that their use of social media to discuss political issues has increased even further.

The nature of their social media usage appears to represent more of a 'civic monologue' than an 'elite dialogue'. With the exception of MSYPs, there is little direct engagement with politicians, journalists, commentators etc, but a much higher incidence of giving their own opinion or retweeting someone else's opinion.

[www.democraticaudit.com/2015/11/07/the-scottish-independence-referendum-shows-that-young-people-can-be-mobilized-politically-given-the-right-circumstances/](http://www.democraticaudit.com/2015/11/07/the-scottish-independence-referendum-shows-that-young-people-can-be-mobilized-politically-given-the-right-circumstances/)

# Examples of youth democracy



## Getting young people in the habit of voting

In Lewisham the young mayor's project began in 2004 to mirror the direct election of the Mayor of Lewisham. The office of the young mayor in Lewisham works closely with the electoral services team at the council to achieve this.

The elections are promoted and held in every secondary school and college in Lewisham. All young people resident or attending a school in the borough aged 11 to 18 can vote. The young mayor oversees a budget of around £30,000.

Youth workers engage with young people through youth events, school assemblies, class talks and community events to promote awareness of the election and to encourage young people to stand as candidates and to vote.

On polling day, the council's electoral services team run the election in exactly the same way they do for the adult elections. Ballot boxes, voting booths and electoral staff are stationed at each secondary school and college in the borough for the duration of the school day. The count is held the following day, again with the support of electoral staff, and young people assist in this process. The culmination of the process is the results ceremony where the new young mayor, deputy young mayor and young advisors are announced. Elections take place during 'local democracy week' each

year and voter registration, for 16 to 18 year olds, is promoted at the same time.

The partnership approach between electoral services and the participation workers at the office of the young mayor has been critical to the success of this approach.

<https://www.lewisham.gov.uk/mayorandcouncil/youngmayor/Pages/default.aspx>

## European local democracy week

Local Democracy Week is a Europe wide initiative run by the Council of Europe that aims to 'foster the knowledge of local democracy and promote the idea of democratic participation at a local level.' The theme for Local Democracy week in October 2017 was 'citizen participation, consultation and commitment: for a thriving local democracy'

Below are examples from councils of their involvement in 2017.

### St Albans City and District Council

As part of this celebration of local democracy and St Albans City & District Council's continued commitment to promoting involvement in local democracy, the council organised a series of events which included:

### Local schools art and creative writing competition

Schools were invited to demonstrate their creativity by taking part in competitions themed around local democracy. Primary school children

were asked to create a picture illustrating 'What I would do if I was Mayor for the day'. The winner will have tea with the Mayor of the City and District of St Albans, Councillor Iqbal Zia. Secondary school pupils were invited to produce an artwork, poem or short story (maximum 500 words) expressing 'What do I like best about the community in which I live?'

### **Women in politics**

To discuss with district councillors how women can get involved in politics and decision-making locally.

### **Celebrate Older People's Day**

An opportunity for older people to discuss issues relating to local democracy with district councillors face-to-face.

### **Youth Question Time**

Open to sixth form and college student that study in the district, it provided the opportunity to put questions to a live panel of local councillors, empowering them to raise and debate a range of issues, furthering the understanding of local democracy.

### **Essex County Council**

Essex County Council launched a number of resources to help engage school age children find out who their local county councillor was using the tools from the council with the aim of getting councillors to get in touch or visit. As well as opportunities to attend or listen to a meeting online on their website, including the full council meeting held during the week, it also provided opportunities for young people to have their say through public consultations, petitions and feedback and through the two live consultations at the time on their mobile library service and on the Essex Autism Strategy for children and young people as well as through social media to share thoughts on what local democracy means to them as young people @ECC\_DemSer using #LocalDemocracyWeek and #Essex.

### **Young Essex Assembly (YEA)**

The Young Essex Assembly is the elected youth council for Essex and is supported by the Essex Youth Service. There are 75 YEA members, representing all districts across Essex, who decide on the priorities for young people and campaign to make a positive difference.

Elections will be held in the autumn term of 2018 and you can find out how to apply to stand for election on their website.

Members of the YEA have the opportunity to be heard by members of the Essex County Council and other youth groups working to improve the life of youth in Essex to make important decisions.

[www.young-essex-assembly.org.uk/about-us/](http://www.young-essex-assembly.org.uk/about-us/)

### **West Lancashire Borough Council**

Local school children enjoyed taking part in mock meetings of the council to learn more about how West Lancashire Borough Council operates. The Mayor of West Lancashire, Councillor Neil Furey, welcomed groups of young people to the council chamber for a day which included debates and mock voting exercises.

Each school appointed a 'chief officer' to help run the meeting alongside the mayor. The remaining children acted as councillors."

In the morning the pupils took part in a lively session of discussion and interactive activities around the theme of 'refuse and recycling services in West Lancashire'. In the afternoon the high school pupils considered the question: 'Is Green Belt release justified in order to deliver housing and business space?'

Following the debates, the pupils cast their votes at a 'polling station' specially set up for them. The idea was to give the children a taste of debating and decision-making processes.



# Volunteering

## Valuing young voices

A 2010 report on strengthening democracy, produced in partnership by the then Local Government Group and the National Youth Agency, found that youth participation strengthens outcomes by:

- improving service delivery
- development of appropriate provision
- improving community cohesion
- improving personal and social confidence in young people
- improving skills of young people
- improving the political literacy of young people
- saving councils money.

The report looked in particular at the importance placed on encouraging young people to participate in voluntary and community-based activities, to provide positive experiences, skills, confidence and potentially as a stepping stone to more 'political' activity.

Volunteering is one of the main ways in which young people participate in their local communities, with the Office for National Statistics reporting that 16-24 year olds are the age group most likely to volunteer, and to volunteer for the longest time. The National Citizen Service is also available to all 15-17 year olds, and encourages young people to be more active in their communities. This highlights that young people are keen to be involved in their local community and to make a difference; it is up to local councillors to create an environment in which case that enthusiasm and young people's views can be used to improve local services.

Hear by Right is an organisational development tool with resources to help organisations plan, develop and evaluate how they keep young people involved in and at the heart of decision-making. It has been developed by the National Youth Agency with young people to transform young people's lives by developing their voice, influence and place within society.



### Challenge 3 – thinking about putting youth engagement into practice

Reflecting on the issues in Challenge 1, pick one of the issues and consider how you, as a ward councillor, would go about engaging with young people to improve services.

# Next steps and summary

Using this workbook, consider what youth participation is currently taking place in your area. What opportunities exist for you to engage, and how can you build on these?

It's also helpful to evaluate your own skillset and think if there are any areas for personal development for you to pursue. Details of organisations and literature that can help with this are included in the Appendix.



## **Challenge 4 – where do you go from here?**

Use this space to construct your own personal development plan.

- What new skills do you want to develop?
- What visits and conversations are you going to plan to engage with young people in your area? Include any conversations you need to have with council officers.
- List any courses or events you are interested in undertaking.
- Schedule these plans to create a timeframe for action.

# Appendix 1

## Further information and support

The LGA offers a wide range of publications and case studies at [www.local.gov.uk](http://www.local.gov.uk).

For information on councillor development programmes, visit [www.local.gov.uk/our-support/highlighting-political-leadership](http://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/highlighting-political-leadership)

### **National Youth Agency**

[www.nya.org.uk](http://www.nya.org.uk)

### **UK Youth Parliament**

[www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk](http://www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk)

### **British Youth Council**

[www.byc.org.uk](http://www.byc.org.uk)

### **My Life, My Say**

[www.mylifemysay.org.uk](http://www.mylifemysay.org.uk)

### **Shout Out UK**

[www.shoutoutuk.org](http://www.shoutoutuk.org)

### **Participation Works**

[www.participationworks.org.uk](http://www.participationworks.org.uk)

### **Girlguiding UK Attitudes Survey**

<https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/social-action-advocacy-and-campaigns/research/girls-attitudes-survey/>

### **Children's Society Good Childhood Report**

<https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/good-childhood-report>

### **British Social Attitudes Report**

[www.natcen.ac.uk/series/british-social-attitudes](http://www.natcen.ac.uk/series/british-social-attitudes)

### **National Citizen Service**

[www.ncsyes.co.uk](http://www.ncsyes.co.uk)

### **Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport survey**

[www.gov.uk/guidance/taking-part-survey](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/taking-part-survey)

### **Getting the 'missing millions' on to the electoral register**

[https://tobysjamesdotcom.files.wordpress.com/2013/11/getting-the-e28098missing-millions\\_-on-to-the-electoral-register-report-appg-on-democratic-participation-bite-the-ballot-dr-toby-james-clearview-research-2016-1.pdf](https://tobysjamesdotcom.files.wordpress.com/2013/11/getting-the-e28098missing-millions_-on-to-the-electoral-register-report-appg-on-democratic-participation-bite-the-ballot-dr-toby-james-clearview-research-2016-1.pdf)





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