



Agenda Item

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Youth Council - Youth Engagement Review

Title: Youth Council - Youth Engagement Review
Meeting: Executive
Date: 12 June 2018
Submitted By: Director of Corporate and Housing Services

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report outlines the outcomes from the Council's youth engagement review. The review was carried out, by the Officers to assist Members in their decision regarding the establishment of a Falkirk area youth Council.

2. Recommendations

2.1 The Executive is asked to agree:-

- (1) Develop in conjunction with young people an online survey platform, similar to the Citizens Panel;**
- (2) Promote youth engagement activities more effectively using the online channels which are preferred by young people;**
- (3) Work closely with schools and Forth Valley College to provide young people opportunities to get involved in youth engagement;**
- (4) Use social media to keep young people informed of changes and developments in their local areas;**
- (5) Regularly ask young people what issues are important to them and design engagement activities around this. This may be achieved through an annual survey through which an engagement agenda is developed; and**
- (6) Manage the expectations of young people by being honest about the scope of their influence over decision making processes.**

3. Background

- 3.1 In response to a motion put forward to the Council to establish a Falkirk area youth council, a review of how effectively Falkirk Council engages with young people was conducted by Officers.
- 3.2 While the Council 'engages' with young people in a variety of ways. We encourage young people to participate in things such as youth clubs, in schools activities, in sports clubs etc. etc. We also consult with young people in a variety of ways. We also encourage youth engage with us and partners too. These terms are often used interchangeable and can be confused. This report focusses on who we find out what issues are important to young people

and get the to participate in decisions that affect them i.e. how we inform and consult with young people on issues that are important to them.

3.3 To this effect the purpose of the review was to:

- Learn how to better engage with young people;
- Find out how young people want to engage with the Council;
- Identify barriers to engagement; and
- Understand views on the introduction of a youth council.

3.4 The review began in March 2018. It was, largely, guided by the results of an online survey of young people, aged 12-25 living in the Falkirk Council Area. The survey was designed to identify *if* and *how* young people want to engage with the Council.

4. Consultation

Overview

4.1 An online survey of young people, aged 12-25, was carried out in the Falkirk Council area. It gathered insights on:

- The issues, if any, that are most important to young people (for example, schools and education, transport, housing, mental health, sport and recreation, etc.);
- The extent to which young people feel they can influence decisions made by the Council;
- The types of engagement activities which young people are most interested in participating in (for example, youth council, online surveys, workshops, etc.).
- Any barriers preventing young people from getting involved in engagement activities.

4.2 The survey was hosted on Citizen Space - the Council's online platform used to develop and host surveys.

4.3 The survey was aimed at all young people, aged 12 - 25, living in the Falkirk Council area. There are around 26,400 young people aged 10 – 25 living in Falkirk Council area according to Census data. This figure was used as the approximate size of the target demographic. A statistically significant sample was, thus, calculated as 587. The survey received 627 responses and the findings of the survey can, therefore, be generalised to the wider population of 12-25 year olds living in the Falkirk Council area.

Promotion

- 4.4 Careful consideration was given to the promotion of the survey as historically, young people were unlikely to be reached using the Council's usual communication channels.
- 4.5 Officers worked with pupils from Larbert High School to create a short video to promote the survey on social media. A budget was allocated to promote the video using paid for advertising on Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook. This was the first time the Council had used Snapchat and Instagram for youth engagement.
- 4.6 The survey was also promoted through a range of other channels, including:
- The Council's Twitter;
 - Liaising with local organisations and services working with young people¹;
 - Posters (using images of pupils from Larbert High);
 - News release.

Results

- 4.7 The key findings of the survey are summarised below:
- 82% of young people agree or strongly agree that they would like to be involved in making decisions that affect them and their local area;
 - They have a particular interest in influencing Schools and Education, Jobs, Careers and Training and Mental Health. They are least interested in influencing Bins, Rubbish and Recycling and Community Safety;
 - 53% of young people agree or strongly agree they can influence decisions affecting their local area;
 - 37% of young people agree or strongly agree that their participation in youth engagement activities would have influence over decisions made by the Council;
 - 15% of young people have been involved in Council youth engagement activities;
 - 30% of young people are interested in joining the Council's Citizen Panel.
 - 28% of young people are interested in joining a youth council;
 - 70% of young people said their preferred method of youth engagement is online surveys.
 - 29% of young people know how to get involved in Council youth engagement activities;

¹ Including: Forth Valley College; Year of Young People ambassadors; Falkirk District Scouts; Girlguiding Scotland; Action on Hearing Loss; Al Masaar; Apex; Army Cadet Force; Falkirk and Clackmannanshire Carers Centre; Forth Valley Migrant Support Network; LGBT Youth Scotland; Rainbow Muslim Women's Group; and Epilepsy Connections.

- The biggest barriers to involvement are: not knowing how to get involved; not feeling confident enough to get involved; not having enough spare time; and not feeling knowledgeable enough to get involved;
- Young people would prefer to receive information about changes and developments in the Falkirk Council area through: school and college; email; Facebook; and Twitter.

5. Outcomes of the Consultation

Online surveys

- 5.1 New media and technologies are transforming participation. For this reason, the Council must carefully consider the methods through which it delivers youth engagement. The results of the consultation suggest that establishing a youth council is not the best solution. Just over a quarter of young people who responded were interested in joining a youth council and under a fifth showed interest in joining other youth groups.
- 5.2 This suggests that traditional, “face-to-face”, methods of engagement are no longer as popular for this type of activity as they once were. What is clear is that online surveys are the most favoured method of engagement, with almost three quarters of young people rating this as their preferred method. Half of young people are also eager to engage with the Council on social media. The Council must think carefully how such an approach will be packaged. Under a third of young people found the Council’s existing online survey channel –the Citizens Panel – appealing.
- 5.3 Such an approach would, therefore, require careful design. Officers could hold a focus group, with young people, to examine the potential design and promotion of a more appealing online survey platform. This may involve testing the types of questions, frequency, and duration of future surveys.

Social media and the promotion of youth engagement

- 5.4 Less than a third of young people know how to get involved in Council youth engagement activities, yet over three quarters of young people said they want to be involved. The Council needs to improve its promotion of youth engagement activities and, more importantly, provide more opportunities for young people to participate.
- 5.5 The results of the survey show that young people prefer to receive information about changes and developments in their local area, online. Overall, Facebook and Twitter were the most popular information channels; however, Snapchat and Instagram were popular with young people under 16. More traditional methods, such as post and public events, were most unpopular.
- 5.6 It is important that the Council look at how it can better use web and social media platforms to engage with young people. This work is currently ongoing

by Officers within the Council. Officers are looking to develop the Council's existing social media platforms as a customer contact tool. This would involve the use of an integrated social media management tool allowing more control of the Council's numerous social media channels as well as enhancing its ability to respond to customer enquiries more efficiently.

- 5.7 Officers can examine existing social media channels across the Council and how they are used, and identify the most appropriate ones for future engagement with young people. The planned appointment of a Digital Communications Officer will assist in this work.

Working with schools and colleges

- 5.8 The responses of young people, under the age of 19, showed a demand for school and college based activities. This does not however mean more surveys. Members will be aware of the work in the east locality that has engaged young people in understanding their views on their local area. This involvement needs to be further developed as locality planning progresses.
- 5.9 Officers from Corporate & Housing Services and Children's Services may wish to meet quarterly to discuss appropriate approaches to any planned youth engagement work to ensure a consistent approach and maximise opportunities to engage with young people. This should also include working with relevant community planning partners, such as Forth Valley College.

Capacity building

- 5.10 The young people who responded to the survey said they lack the knowledge and confidence to get involved in youth engagement. Work must be done to increase young people's understanding of local government and the issues in their local communities. This doesn't always necessitate large scale citizenship education programmes. Knowledge can be improved simply by getting better at giving young people the information they need to form opinions and make decisions on local issues. As already discussed, young people have asked us to provide this information, predominantly, through social media and at school and college. Again locality planning might be the vehicle for addressing this.

Issues important to young people

- 5.11 The Council must be mindful of young people's interests when designing youth engagement activities. The young people who responded to this survey said that they want to influence: schools and education; mental health; and jobs, careers and training. They are less interested in influencing bins, rubbish and recycling and community safety. Young people are increasingly interested in global issues and the Council needs to find a way to make local issues relevant to wider global debates, such as environmentalism and human rights. The Council can better engage young people by consulting them on the issues they have told us are important.

- 5.12 These interests will change over time and the Council should regularly consult with young people to set an engagement agenda. This may be achieved through online surveys or an annual youth conference which would bring young people together to identify the most important issues for young people in the area.

Managing expectations

- 5.13 Just over a third of young people believe that Council youth engagement activities would have any influence over Council decision making. On several occasions, young people said that youth engagement would be a “waste of time” and “would make no difference”. Less than half felt their views would be valued by the Council.
- 5.14 This wish to be involved in decision making must be addressed by the Council in our approach to community engagement and participation. This can mean designing participatory budgeting in a way that involves young people in influencing the resources that impact on their lives. However It will not always be possible to act on the contributions of young people. It is, thus, important that the Council is transparent in its use of the language of participation. If young people can only have a limited voice in decision making, then this must be made clear. In other words, the Council must be honest about the scope of young people’s influence.

6. Implications

Financial

- 6.1 The costs to the Council, to undertake the recommended work, can be met within existing service budgets.

Resources

- 6.2 The recommended work can be carried out by officers in Corporate and Housing Services and Children’s Services.

Legal

- 6.3 None.

Risk

- 6.4 There is a risk that if the Council does not better engage and communicate with young people it will not deliver on its corporate plan priorities and fulfil its obligations with regards Community Empowerment.

Equalities

- 6.5 If members develop an online survey platform for young people, an equality and poverty impact assessment will be required.

Sustainability/Environmental Impact

- 6.6 None.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1 Young people want to engage with the Council using new media and technologies, such as online surveys and social media. Traditional methods of “face-to-face” engagement are less popular among young people and it is advised that the Council do not establish a youth council.
- 7.2 Youth engagement opportunities need to be better promoted to young people and, alongside expanding its social media presence, the Council should work closely with youth groups, schools and colleges to achieve this. Through better use of social media, and by working more closely with schools and colleges, the Council can improve young people’s knowledge of local government and the issues in their local areas. This will give young people the confidence they need to participate in decision making.
- 7.3 Young people may not be interested in all community issues and the Council should consider consulting with young people annually to set the youth engagement agenda for the year. The Council must be transparent, however, about the scope of young people’s influence so that young people’s expectations are managed.

Director of Corporate & Housing Services

Author: Emily Webb, Stakeholder Engagement Officer, emily.webb@falkirk.gov.uk
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Background Paper

Falkirk Council Youth Engagement Review (Full Report)