

Report to:	Council	5 October 2023
Lead Cabinet Member:	Councillor Bill Handley (Communities)	
From:	Communications and Communities Service Manager	

Young People in South Cambridgeshire

Executive Summary

1. The purpose of this report is to summarise the work carried out and conclusions reached by the Young People Task & Finish Group and to present to Council the recommendations approved by the Scrutiny and Overview Committee and endorsed, with a few amendments, by Cabinet on 28 September 2023.
2. The aim should be to seek opportunities to create or develop effective youth engagement. To this end, communication is key using methods and platforms with which young people are most comfortable and familiar.

Recommendations

3. Cabinet recommends that Full Council
 - asks officers to share the general feedback received from young people during the Task & Finish Group's work with local authorities and educational providers so they can take this into account when providing their services.
 - asks officers to write to Village Colleges in South Cambridgeshire to offer the opportunity to present to them on the elections process and ask if we can further support their curriculum.
 - notes the successful youth engagement programme currently run by the Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service and supports the provision of

appropriate coaching to enable officers in other priority areas such as housing and local business to find ways of similarly involving young people.

- Asks officers to investigate the feasibility of holding, within the next 12 months, a scheduled meeting of the Climate and Environment Advisory Committee at a local educational establishment, to which students and other young people should be invited.
- Asks The Leader to write a letter to the Mayor of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority highlighting the feedback from young people on the limitations of public transport and urging him to take into account their views when developing proposals for bus franchising.
- invites young people, including from the groups approached as part of the Task & Finish exercise (**Appendix 1**), to contribute evidence to officers involved in developing a new Equality Policy embracing generational differences.
- encourages all Members of South Cambridgeshire District Council to commit to engaging with young people and representative organisations in their wards by establishing regular visits to local schools, colleges, youth clubs and other locations as appropriate.

Reasons for Recommendations

4. The Young People Task & Finish Group was detailed by the Scrutiny and Overview Committee to undertake a wide-ranging review of Council engagement with young people. Six of its seven recommendations are set out above. The Scrutiny and Overview Committee concluded that the Task & Finish Group's seventh recommendation should be removed at this stage. Paragraph 14 of this report refers to that recommendation. Cabinet itself recommends that Full Council asks officers to write to Village Colleges in South Cambridgeshire to offer the opportunity to present to them on the elections process and ask if we can further support their curriculum.

Details

5. At its meeting in July 2022, Full Council unanimously approved the following Motion:

“South Cambs is a major growth area. We know that many of these new homes will attract young families and the number of young people in the district will rise. It is therefore hugely important that the voice of young people is heard in the development of the Council's policies for the future of the District. This Council encourages youth engagement in local politics and supports the greater involvement of young people in decision-making at the Council and requests Cabinet to establish a cross-party Members' Task & Finish Group to consider options for delivering this.”

6. The Leader of the Council asked the Scrutiny and Overview Committee to set up a Task & Finish Group, and that Committee appointed five Members to the Group on 6 September 2022, namely Councillors Graham Cone, Stephen Drew, Sue Ellington, Helene Leeming, and Richard Stobart.
7. The Scrutiny and Overview Committee approved Terms of Reference for the Task and Finish Group as attached at **Appendix 2** to this report.
8. The Task & Finish Group identified several factors that would be essential in guiding its work. These were:
 - a sense of place and inclusion
 - the importance of community involvement
 - influence
 - giving young people a voice
 - listening to what young people have to say so that they know that they have been heard
 - understanding that young people already engage but just differently, and accepting that if they are to be expected to engage in some other way, young people must truly believe that alternative to be worthwhile
9. From the beginning of January 2023, Task & Finish Group members met with young people aged between 11 and 25. These came from several different backgrounds: schools, colleges, university, youth groups and children in care. The Task & Finish Group held regular meetings at which Members and officers have been able to discuss key points and plans. It was originally hoped that this information gathering part of the exercise would be completed by the end of March but, in the event, circumstances necessitated extension of the timeline.
10. The diversity and small number of young people interviewed made it possible to identify only the broadest trends. Task & Finish Group members were able to draw upon several pieces of anecdotal evidence to give an idea of how young people see themselves in the context of the world around them to build on some of the ways in which South Cambridgeshire District Council already engages with young people. As an example, feedback from a group of students aged between 14 and 18 at Impington Village College indicated the following:
 - Such an age group is no more or less knowledgeable about local government structures than adults
 - 14-18 year-olds understand how Council activity can affect them, such as planning
 - most are aware of who empties black, blue, and green bins
 - they tend not to engage with councils because they don't consider it to be necessary
 - their preferred methods of communication are often not available
 - they are aware that sometimes it is necessary to use the telephone
 - they like the layout and usability of the South Cambridgeshire District Council website

- they know who their MPs are (Lucy Fraser MP often visits the College) but aren't so aware of their local Councillors
 - there is an inclination not to vote
11. One challenge facing the Task & Finish Group was the age-range they wanted to look at – from 11 to 25. The two separate meetings with 'younger' and 'older' members of Waterbeach Action for Youth revealed that those two groups at least had vastly different aspirations.
12. The Task & Finish Group had the benefit of data from the 2021 Census (**Appendix 3**) and specially designed boards showing the responsibilities of Parish, District and County Councils (see **Appendix 4**). These boards were used to guide discussion but, even so, some concerns of the young people engaged related to areas not directly the responsibility of South Cambridgeshire District Council. The principal one of these was transport where this Council is a stakeholder but not a provider. There was however recognition of the part played by this Council in the provision of housing, both directly and through the planning process. A notable comment made at the meeting with the Children in Care Council was that houses should not be built if water resources were scarce or on 'nature reserves' (green space). A recurring theme seemed to be that there was a need for spaces for young people to 'hang out'. While young people were aware of the environment around them, and disappointed when they see litter, it is surprising perhaps that no specific reference was made to climate change.
13. The Task & Finish Group considered it important that all local Members should commit themselves to improving youth engagement in their respective areas. Parish and Town Councils also have a role to play.
14. The Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service was recognised as having a high profile in terms of youth engagement. Task & Finish Group members considered that the methods employed there could be invaluable in developing youth engagement in other aspects of the Council's work. Members noted in passing the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) that sets out the kind of things that members of the public could expect from South Cambridgeshire District Council. Members were keen that a specific and easily understood statement of intent relating to young people should be incorporated into an updated SCI and this has now been actioned.
15. They also noted some of the measures adopted in engaging with young people as part of consultation about the Greater Cambridge Local Plan. These included events designed to identify things that had not been covered up to that stage. The Task & Finish Group recognised the importance of being aware of "not knowing what we don't know" and making sure that processes are kept up-to-date and relevant.

Options

16. Full Council can
- Adopt the recommendations from Cabinet in full; or

- amend some or all the recommendations, delete recommendations and add new ones; or
- reject the findings of the Young People Task & Finish Group and recommendations from Cabinet.

Implications

17. In the writing of this report, taking into account financial, legal, staffing, risk, equality and diversity, climate change, and any other key issues, the following implications have been considered:-

Financial

18. There will be cost implications, but these have not been assessed yet.

Legal

19. None

Staffing

20. There will be staffing implications, but these have not been assessed yet.

Risks/Opportunities

21. There will be opportunities, but these have not been assessed yet.

Equality and Diversity

22. There will be implications, but these have not been assessed yet.

Climate Change

23. None

Health & Wellbeing

24. There will be health and wellbeing implications, but these have not been assessed yet.

Consultation responses

25. Consultation took the form of meetings with several different groups of young people. It was not possible to speak with some groups either because of confidentiality or safeguarding reasons or because relevant young people could not be identified.

Alignment with Council Priority Areas

Housing that is truly affordable for everyone to live in

26. Affordability is a concern to those wishing to live and work in South Cambridgeshire.

Being green to our core

27. Young people value the environment in which they live.

A modern and caring Council

28. Young people represent the District's future, and it is important that they should be given an opportunity to shape that future while recognising the needs of other groups in the community.

Lessons learned

29. The Young People Task & Finish Group had trouble in engaging with some young people whose input would have been invaluable. Foremost among these were young employees and charities. The Task & Finish Group was also unsuccessful in engaging with young council house tenants.

29. Possible reasons for this include

- economic factors making it difficult for employers to give employees time to meet as a group with Members.
- a lack of understanding of why the Task & Finish Group had been established.
- a general reluctance to engage.
- the need to safeguard those deemed most vulnerable.

Background Papers

- Notes of Young People Task & Finish Group meetings (October 2022 to July 2023)
- Notes of meetings with young people helping to inform this report

- Report from the Young People Task & Finish Group to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee on 7 September 2023
- Report from the Scrutiny & Overview Committee to Cabinet on 28 September 2023
- Cabinet decision sheet, 28 September 2023

Appendices

- Appendix 1: List of Groups interviewed.
- Appendix 2: Terms of Reference for the Young People Task & Finish Group
- Appendix 3: Young people in South Cambridgeshire (Source: 2021 Census)
- Appendix 4: Foamex boards

Report Author:

Ian Senior – Scrutiny and Governance Adviser
Telephone: (01954) 713000