

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Leader and Cabinet

8 September 2011

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ESTABLISHING A YOUTH COUNCIL

Purpose

1. To receive Cabinet approval to the proposals to establish a South Cambridgeshire District Youth Council.
2. This is not a key decision but has been brought to Cabinet for approval because it is likely to have implications across portfolios, directly affecting services received by the public through increased involvement of the District's youth in decisions which affect them. It was first published in the August 2011 Forward Plan.

Recommendations

3. That Cabinet agree to
 - (a) the establishment of a South Cambridgeshire District Youth Council from September 2012, and
 - (b) to adopt the Action Plan at **Appendix A**.

Reasons for Recommendations

4. Establishment of a Youth Council supports the Council's commitments set out in the Children and Young People's Plan to provide opportunities for children and young people to have a say in decisions that may affect them in their local area. It will also support the Council's bid for Quality Charter accreditation for Member Development, by increasing opportunities for elected councillors in their roles as community leaders, working with all sections of the community and supporting the District's young people to become engaged in local government issues.

Background

5. Cabinet agreed the Children and Young People's Plan on 31 March 2011, which set out how the District Council provides opportunities for children and young people to have a say in decisions that may affect them in their local area through:
 - (a) the Council's existing networks with village colleges (i.e., through consultation workshops, Dual Use Sports and Arts Development Managers);
 - (b) Connections Youth Bus, an existing facility for consulting with children and young people, as well as the Connections Youth Bus Forum, which is made up of two young people representatives from each village that it visits;
 - (c) Facebook page and on-line surveys.

Furthermore, all SCDC reports now have a section to ensure children and young people are considered when consultations are undertaken.

6. On 11 November 2010, the Leader, Major Opposition Group Leader and Chief Executive signed an undertaking committing the authority to attaining Quality Charter status for elected member development. One of the requirements of the Charter is

the establishment of a youth council. Members' involvement in promoting the youth council and to supporting and encouraging the youth councillors is a development opportunity for councillors in their community leadership role.

7. Nationally, there are a number of other Youth Councils in existence and further information in relation to Youth Councils can be found on the British Youth Council's website at: www.byc.org.uk. The British Youth Council's websites provides a wealth of information and tools to support establishment of local youth councils, including training and development packs. Another good example of the valid contributions made by youth councils is: <http://www.horshamyouthcouncil.org.uk/>

Considerations

8. The next step for the Council would be to establish a Youth Council as follows:
 - a. Establishment of a Shadow Youth Council of 15 shadow youth council members by January 2012. Existing networks would be used to nominate two representatives from each village college, from the communities visited by the Connections Youth Bus and to also seek volunteers via the South Cambs Magazine;
 - b. The Shadow Youth Council would be tasked with establishing Terms of Reference / Constitution for the permanent Youth Council, which would include role and remit, number of Youth Councillors, frequency of meetings, etc. The Shadow Youth Council would also oversee the election process;
 - c. Formal elections will be carried out using the existing networks, with promotion of the Youth Council in *South Cambs magazine*, SCDC Website, Twitter and Facebook;
 - d. Establishment of the elected Youth Council in September 2012.
9. Once established, a Youth Council would require training, mentoring and administrative support for agendas, minute-taking, publishing of papers, etc. Much of this work would be undertaken using social media and networks such as Facebook, SCDC website, Twitter and email, therefore maximising existing channels of communications. Although number and frequency of meetings should be agreed by the Shadow Youth Council while setting terms of reference, it is anticipated that no more than two full Youth Council meetings per year would be required. Again the use of social media and 'virtual' meetings would enable effective communications without unnecessary drain on resources travelling to and from meetings. There are a number of options available with regard to venues for meetings such as the Village Colleges themselves, where Village College mini buses could be used to transport the young people to and from their respective Village College base, or back to their villages.
10. When considering the establishment of a Youth Council, Councillors and members of the Shadow Youth Council will need to consider:
 - a. **Age range:** there is no set age range but most Youth Councils encompass an age range of 11 – 18 yrs old. This is a very large age range not only in terms of numbers of young people but also levels of understanding and maturity. It may be worth considering narrowing the age range for the first two years to 14 – 18 to enable focused, cost effective training and development followed by review, feedback and evaluation before deciding on future age ranges. It will also enable succession planning;
 - b. **Remit:** what will the Youth Council do and how will this be recognised formally within the Council's existing Constitution? Opportunities for Youth Council involvement could be via standing items on Cabinet and Council agendas for Youth Council spokesmen to report to these bodies on the general work of the Youth Council, its priorities and challenges. Youth Council members would also be able to attend and contribute to Portfolio Holder meetings and Scrutiny and Overview Committee meetings;

- c. **Structure:** the Youth Council's governance structure should reflect its remit and while final details would come via the Shadow Council's work, it is anticipated that there should be an elected Chairman and Vice-chairman as well as Youth Portfolio Holders and smaller working groups for areas of specific interest;
- d. **Budget:** It is really important that the Youth Council is not just a talking shop, but gives a real power and responsibility to the young people involved. It is recommended that £1,000 should be set aside for the Shadow Youth Council's use and that part of the remit of the fully elected and formally established Youth Council will be to set its own budget the following year. The Youth Council will receive advice and guidance to do this but will have to follow standard council conventions and considerations. Once developed, the budget proposals would then follow normal District Council expenditure processes;
- e. **Adding value:** To capture and retain the interest of young people in a Youth Council, the Youth Council must have a meaningful role. It is essential that the Youth Council is not just a tick box exercise but something that Members feel will make a valuable and valid contribution to the work of the Council. Councils that have experience of Youth Councils welcome the enthusiasm and commitment young people bring "They (young people) are valuable not only as future adults but people who have a place in society now...Not involving children and young people has its consequences. It breeds discontent and resentment...It is only through having rights that young people learn to respect other people's rights" C. Willow (1997) 'Hear! Hear! Promoting Children and Young People's Democratic Participation in Local Government'. Youth Councils enable young people to voice their concerns, participate in local government, and be empowered to take decisions and action to improve their local community. Youth Councils also enable Local Councils to truly represent the whole of the community they live in, become more vibrant, modern and dynamic, encourage young people to vote and become councillors when they are old enough and improve services to young people. Youth Councils enable local communities to become safer and more sustainable, more vibrant and progressive and improve services and be more representative and responsive to their local communities.

- 11. An action plan is attached at Appendix A.
- 12. Swavesey Village College has approached the Council about an 18-month placement for a work experience student, who will work for SCDC one day per week (after which s/he will receive a diploma provided by the school to accompany his/her CV and college applications). Details should be confirmed by September 2011 for a start date towards the end of September 2011. The establishment of a Youth Council provides an ideal opportunity for the student to work initially with the Shadow Council and then the elected Youth Council, to provide administrative support, keep the website up-to-date and oversee the Young Voice page in *South Cambs magazine*.

Options

- 13. Not to establish a Youth Council. The Council could struggle to find alternative means of demonstrating its commitment to South Cambridgeshire's young people as set out in the Children and Young People's Plan, and could fail to achieve Charter Status for Elected Member Development.
- 14. Not to establish a Shadow Youth Council and to formalise the process for elections, the terms of reference and the way that the Youth Council would operate within the Council's existing Constitution before seeking candidates. The recommendation to establish a Shadow Youth Council ensures that the young people have a say in the

development of their Council through active participation and consultation, to produce an outcome which best matches the aspirations of the young people within the Council's existing structures.

15. Young people have an active interest in their local communities and the opportunities afforded by a Youth Council will provide a high level of interest. Young people are very interested in housing development and growth areas because they worry about their own futures as well as those of others in their local communities (eg, where might they live and work). Young people want to see local training and employment opportunities and easier access to facilities across the district. A key area of interest for young people is also climate change and environmental sustainability; all of these areas would very much benefit from the input of young people.

Implications

16. Financial	None specific at this time. Other than travel expenses, it is expected that the Shadow Youth Council can be established within existing budgets. As previously explained more efficient ways of meeting, use of social media and the internet as well as organising meetings across the district in local areas will be used. As part of the remit of the fully elected Youth Council, it will be expected to set its own budget and consideration of meetings, travelling and transport will be a key consideration for the Youth Council. External sources of funding will be explored once the Shadow Youth Council is in place.
Legal	None specific at this time. Changes may be needed to the Constitution to reflect the ways that the Youth Council has input into issues facing South Cambridgeshire, or raises matters with Council bodies.
Staffing	A work placement student from Swavesey Village College will undertake an administrative role. It is anticipated that the Youth Council will be largely self-supporting in the long-term, but the Principal Lead for Community Infrastructure and Democratic Services Team Leader will be key contacts in the early years.
Risk Management	The most significant risk is that the Youth Council is not recognised and respected, both within the authority itself and within the community the Youth Council represents, leading to disengagement from South Cambridgeshire's young people.
Equality and Diversity	The Connections Youth Bus visits Gypsy and Traveller sites within South Cambridgeshire. Promoting the Youth Council and offering opportunities for involvement in it through the Connections Youth Bus ensures that hard-to-reach villages, including those outside of Village College catchment areas, are not left out.
Equality Impact Assessment completed	No. One will be carried out as part of the work of the Shadow Youth Council.
Climate Change	None specific.

Consultations

17. Councillor Bridget Smith, Member Champion for Children and Young People, who supports the recommendation and has offered to help wherever possible.

Consultation with Children and Young People

18. Extensive consultation with children and young people took place when putting together the Young People's Plan, which demonstrated that children and young people were very keen to contribute to decisions made about the things that affect them in their lives. Further consultation will take place regarding the establishment of a Youth Council through the Village Colleges, Connections Youth Bus, village youth groups, *South Cambs magazine*, Facebook and Twitter during autumn 2011 to encourage interest in the Youth Council. The Shadow Youth Council will be expected to undertake a comprehensive consultation as part of its work in determining the Youth Council's Aims, terms of reference, accountability, reporting lines, elections process, etc.

Effect on Strategic Aims

19. Commitment to listening to and engaging with our local community: support for a Youth Council is key to demonstrating commitment to listening to and engaging with the District's youth.
20. Commitment to making South Cambridgeshire a place in which residents can feel proud to live: the Youth Council will be a voice for young people in the District, to ensure that the Council has their input into decisions which affect them. Through the Council's partnership links with the Village Colleges, the Connections Youth Bus, local youth groups, Parish Councils and District Councillors themselves, the Youth Council will be able to represent the entire district.
21. Commitment to assisting provision for local jobs for you and your family: the Youth Council and the work placement programme will help young people develop skills which will support them in their future careers. It might even serve as an informal apprenticeship for a career in public service.

Conclusions / Summary

22. The recommendation to establish a Shadow Youth Council ensures that the young people have a say in the development of their Council through active participation and consultation, to produce an outcome which best matches the aspirations of the young people within the Council's existing structures.
23. The recommendation to establish a Youth Council would also bring a commitment and enthusiasm to South Cambs District Council. The establishment of a Youth Council representing the views of young people across the whole of the District, would bring greater understanding of democratic processes, issues and concerns faced by local authorities, civic duties, encouragement to participate as adults and, perhaps most importantly, a commitment to live and work in South Cambridgeshire as adults knowing that they had helped to shape the area as young people.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report: Children and Young People's Plan
Quality Charter for Elected Member Development criteria

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