

Introduction

During the summer of 2012 Stockton on Tees Borough Council reviewed its arrangements for listening to the voices of local young people and engaging them as partners in decision making.

The British Youth Council's self-assessment tool was used to evaluate the existing 'youth-voice' arrangements. This identified various strengths and areas for development in youth participation – i.e. to be more successful in listening to, and acting on the views of young people.

Previously, a Shadow Youth Board (SYB) had been established to ensure young people's views were represented within the Children's Trust Board. The young people involved were volunteers and not democratically elected. The role of the SYB was limited and not linked to the Council's decision making structures and scrutiny processes.

The review led to a Youth Participation report being presented to the Council's Cabinet on 6 Sept 2012 with updated plans for:

- establishing a more representative and democratically appointed Youth Assembly
- the election process for the Borough's next Member of the Youth Parliament (MYP)

It was recognised that the future involvement of young people needed to be organised in a more structured way – to ensure that members of the new youth assembly would be drawn from a wider cross section of young people from across the borough.

The election process to decide who would be the borough's next member of the UK Youth Parliament was used to generate interest, enthusiasm and momentum for the new structure and launch Stockton Youth Assembly (Sept. 2012 – March 2013).

Since then we have produced one 'End of Term' report on the progress we have made and had a further UK Youth Parliament Election (UK YP) in February 2015. Jess Hugill from Conyers Sixth Form was elected as the borough's representative. Her Deputy is Kushan Bhardwaj. The next election is due in February 2017.

What is a Youth Manifesto?

Young people, just like everyone else, have opinions about the influences and issues which shape their lives, and about the changes we would like to see.

A Manifesto brings these together as a public announcement about our determination and commitment to do something about them. It lets the public know what important changes, we as young people want to see, and what we are going to do to try and make them a reality – to help improve our lives.

Who has produced it?

This Manifesto has been produced by the young people who form the current **Stockton Youth Assembly (SYA)**.

We are aged between 11 – 19 years old and represent that age group (and young people up to 25 years old with special needs) in this borough.

At present our members include young people from secondary schools/academies/ student voice councils (public and private), youth clubs, the Black and Minority Ethnic Communities (BME), Young Carers (Eastern Ravens Trust), young people with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities, Looked after Children, our Member of the UK Youth Parliament (MYP) and her Deputy.

What we hope to achieve through this Manifesto?

This is our first manifesto, and we want it to be a foundation for helping to build a better future for everyone. By publishing it we hope that:

1. Politicians, decision makers and service providers in the Borough of Stockton on Tees will take notice of this Young People's Manifesto, and then work in partnership with SYA to take action on the important issues identified in it.
2. It will motivate young people across the borough to discuss the things that matter to them and become inspired to get involved in democracy. Together, we really can make a difference.
3. The wider community will recognise this as an important document, giving their full consideration to its information and ideas, and use it as a tool for positive change in Stockton on Tees.

About Stockton Youth Assembly

Stockton Youth Assembly Meetings – We meet every two months in the Community Zone at North Shore Academy, Stockton. Jess Hugill, our MYP, chairs the meetings.

The meetings are also attended by:

- Councillor Bob Cook, the Leader of the Council
- Councillor Ann McCoy who has special responsibility for council services affecting children and young people
- Councillor Lauriane Povey, the Labour Party's champion for young people – she is the youngest councillor at 19 years old
- Adults with specific knowledge about the issues affecting young people in our Borough;

Aims of Stockton Youth Assembly – This manifesto reflects the purpose of SYA – to represent the Borough's diverse young people, providing a forum for them to express their views and ideas, and empowering them to campaign for change on the issues which are most important to them.

In order to fulfil our role as a voice for local young people we set the following aims:

- making sure the views of young people about issues that affect them are heard by service providers and decision-maker
- identify a Work Plan of priorities for each SYA term. (The word 'term' refers to the period from one UK Youth Parliamentary Election to the next)
- encouraging service providers and decision-makers to listen and respond to the views and needs of young people
- encouraging more young people to get involved in decision making and influencing service provision – by increasing their knowledge and understanding of how these things work – so that they have the confidence to participate
- encouraging all young people to exercise their rights and responsibilities
- promoting positive images of young people and highlighting the contribution we can all make to the community
- campaigning to bring about positive change, or influence improvements for the benefit of all
- producing an 'End of Term' report setting out what has been achieved during the term. The report will be presented to the Council's Children & Young People Select Committee and/or Cabinet, and will be made available on the Council's website – www.stockton.gov.uk

The Consultation Process

Over the last year, young people from all over the Borough have been encouraged to get their voices heard through a variety of events and activities including:

- a '**Borough-wide Debate**' – young people met with officers and councillors from Stockton on Tees Borough Council to discuss a variety of issues affecting young people. The feedback was used as the basis of the SYA's 'Forward Plan' (i.e. a list of topics for us to focus on during this SYA term)
- voting in the national '**Make your mark**' campaign – annual campaign organised by the UK YP to find out which issues matter most to young people aged 11-18 years old. The SYA collected a massive 7,059 votes from local young people in 16 schools/academies/colleges and 23 youth clubs. As a result the top national and local priorities were identified
- the '**Annual Conversation**' – The Council's Children and Young People's Partnership organised this event to provide young people with an opportunity to identify priority health issues and the improvements we would like to see
- **SYA meetings** – our members consider a number of matters affecting young people (outlined in the SYA Forward Plan) and provide the Council, service providers and decision-makers with a youth perspective when planning and developing services

The feedback and information from these meetings, events, activities and SYA meetings has been used to identify the priorities in this manifesto.

Stockton Youth Assembly is working with the Council to ensure that there are as many ways as possible for young people to be able to make their views known. The most recent one is through the use of social media using "#Alex" on Twitter and Facebook.

Youth Manifesto Priorities for 2016/17

Having been through the process of listening, discussing, developing, debating and voting, the following priorities have been identified.

Priority 1: *Employment and Education*

It is essential that education and training equips young people with skills that businesses and employers across the Borough need, and helps to create opportunities to secure a prosperous future. School education and post 16 training provision across the Borough is varied and offers a range of courses, apprenticeships and foundation level programmes. What is less apparent is whether the provision matches the needs of industry and growth sectors or if in fact young people are making informed choices about the prospects of securing employment on completion of their course at an early enough stage.

What we want to see

- Careers advice at an earlier stage to help young people choose the right courses for them
- More opportunities for structured and planned work experience
- More links between schools and local employers
- Greater promotion of events in the Borough such as jobs fairs designed at strengthening links between schools and local employers and help young people understand the opportunities that exist
- A local youth market to allow young entrepreneurs to bring their business ideas to life

Priority 2: *Health and Wellbeing*

Young people are worried about a range of things including school work, exams, relationships and bullying. Young people want to be able to seek help from a person that they know and trust but not a teacher and it is important that young people know where to get information and advice.

What we want to see –

- A confidential contact in every school
- Better and more information on the Internet
- Advice and support about bullying and self-harm and where to seek help
- More information provided at primary school on topics such as sex education, peer pressure, drink and drugs/ legal highs
- More information/discussion about child sexual exploitation through mediums such videos and theatre to raise awareness of child sexual exploitation and how to recognise if this was happening to friends
- More choices of activities and places to go including leisure activities to reduce isolation and promote good mental health and wellbeing

Priority 3: *Giving Young People a Voice*

At present there are a number of vacancies in the membership of SYA. This means that some groups of young people in the borough do not have a representative on SYA. This can limit the opportunities they have to get their views and opinions heard.

The Borough Wide Debate and Annual Conversation provide an excellent chance for young people to influence and shape service provision and decision making that affect their lives. They are also a rare opportunity to meet face to face with senior Councillors and Council Officers.

Young people feel largely unaware of democratic processes and who their local Councillor is. SYA meetings provide a way for us to learn about and understand how decisions are taken. This then allows us to influence them.

16 and 17 year olds are able to be included on the Electoral Register but the majority of 16 and 17 year olds are not registered. Registration is important so that young people are able to exercise their vote in local and national elections when they become 18.

What we want to see

- ‘New’ young people taking up the opportunity join SYA and speak up on half of the groups that are not currently represented. This includes:
Abbey Hill and Northshore Academies; Bishopsgarth, Conyers, Grangefield, Northfield, St. Patrick’s and Teesside High Schools; Stockton Riverside, Bede and Stockton Sixth Form Colleges; Billingham, Stockton, Thornaby and Yarm Youth Clubs; Looked after Children and Care Leavers; BME activity groups
- Make the SYA meetings less formal and more ‘youth friendly’ so that SYA members feel comfortable and confident to speak – giving their views and opinions; asking questions.
- Promote events in a positive way which encourages young people to attend and ensure that people making presentations at meeting and events prepare properly – presenting information in a way that we can understand and a format that we can relate to.
- Increase in the number and diversity of young people involved in the Borough Wide Debate and Annual Conversation.
- Encourage all schools to establish Schools Councils to enable pupils to have a say in the running of the school.
- Increase registration of 16 and 17 year olds by working with schools and colleges to give the young people of our Borough a voice in local and national issues.
- Promoting positive perceptions of young people.

The UK Youth Parliament provides opportunities for 11-18 year olds to bring about social change through their elected Member of the UKYP and co-ordinated national campaigning.

Their annual 'Make your mark' campaign offers our young people the chance to identify the issues that matter most to them, and then to get involved in campaigning about them locally and nationally.

What we want to see

- An increase in the number of local young people getting to take up the opportunity to vote in the 'Make your Mark' campaign and then participate in campaigns which follow
- Support for the top three current Make your Mark Campaigns: Living Wage; A Curriculum to prepare us for life; Tackling racism and religious discrimination particularly against people who are Muslim or Jewish
- Encourage all those who work with our young people to make it a priority to both allocate time for them to take part and to promote participation – i.e. our secondary schools, academies, colleges and leaders of youth groups/organisations

Priority 5: *Promote the Next UK Youth Parliament (UKYP) Election*

The UK Youth Parliament (UKYP) enables young people to use their energy and passion to change the world for the better.

Run by young people for young people, UKYP provides opportunities for young people aged 11-18 years old to use their voice in creative ways to bring about social change.

Currently there are over 600 elected MYP's (Member of Youth Parliament) and DMYPs (Deputy Member of Youth Parliament).

Any young person who is a resident of the UK, and aged between 11 and 18 years old (inclusive) has the right to vote in the election to decide who will be the MYP for their area; and the right to stand as a candidate in their MYP election.

To become an MYP you have to be elected by the young people from your area in an official UKYP election.

It is a very important role, so all secondary schools, academies, sixth forms and colleges are invited to let their students take part in deciding who will be elected.

At the last election in February 2015, 6,292 young people voted out of a total of 9027, making the turnout 69.7% - the highest we have ever had for our MYP election. There were six candidates and eleven secondary schools, academies and colleges took part in the voting.

The next UK Youth Parliament Elections for the Stockton Borough area are due to be held in February 2017.

What we want to see

- All young people entitled to vote get the opportunity to do so
- Encourage every secondary school, academy, sixth forms and college to get involved in the next MYP elections and support any of their students who wish to stand as candidates

What happens next?

Turning Vision into Reality

Democratic Services will work with Youth Direction and the Council to provide information to the Stockton Youth Assembly to help them identify actions to deliver the Manifesto and identify relevant service leads to help with taking the priorities forward.

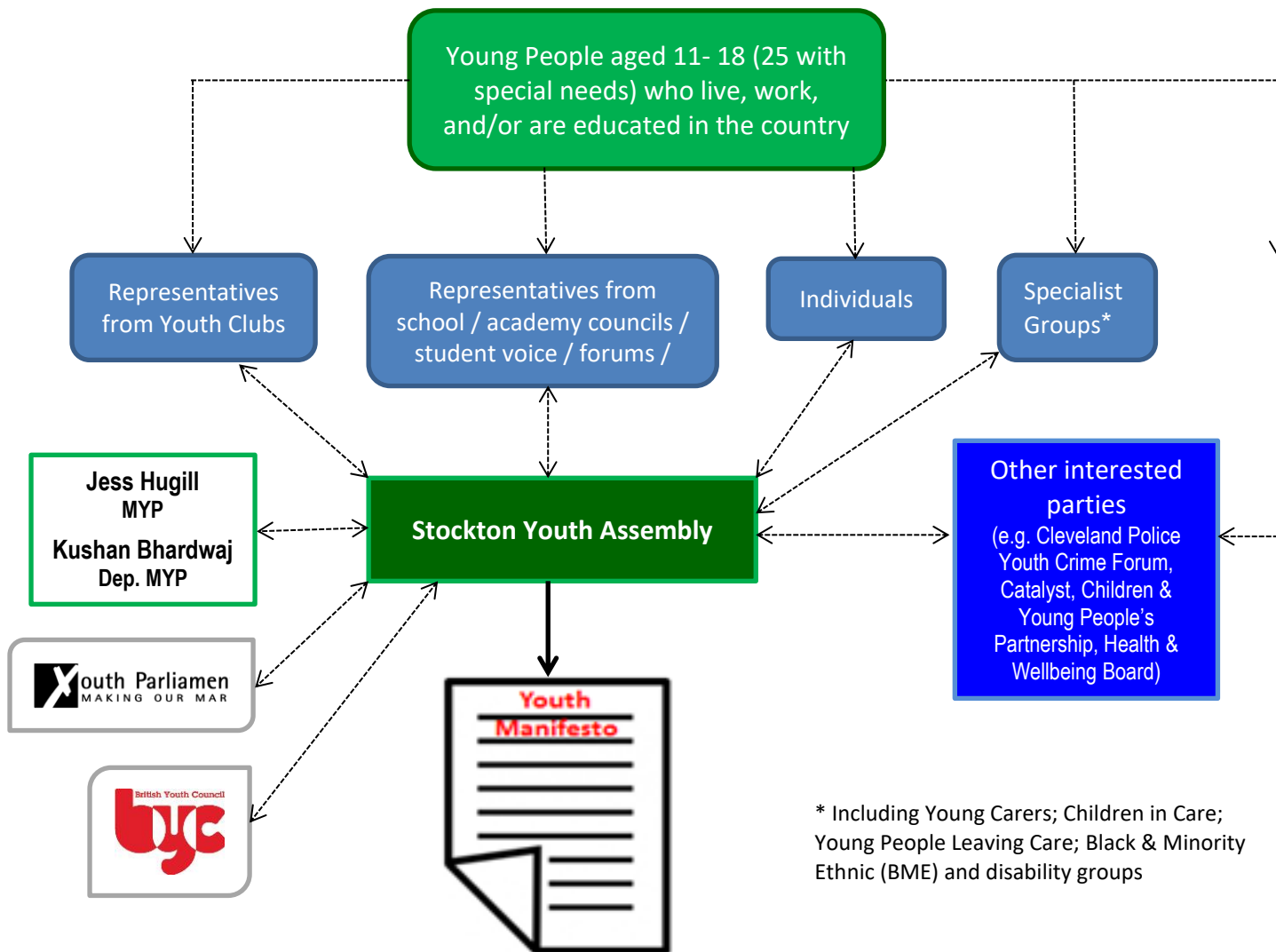
Endorse and Champion this Manifesto

- Confirm that you value the views and opinions of young people.
- Demonstrate that you endorse the aims of this manifesto and will seek to champion them.
- Show that you are committed to working in partnership to achieve its collective priorities, and will do this for the benefit of all young people now and in the future.

We need passionate and committed young people who will join us in working to bring positive changes to our community. Will you help us?

This manifesto can be viewed online at www.stockton.gov.uk/youngpeoplesmanifesto or further copies can be requested using the contact details above.

Appendix 1 – Structure of Stockton Youth Assembly (SYA)



Appendix 2 – Stockton Youth Assembly two year cycle

