



YOUTH ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

INTRODUCTION

This is a new venture for Balsall Parish Council. It is inspired by councillors' recognition that young people or even younger adults in transition from youth to more adult orientated lifestyles and responsibilities do not have a strong enough voice at council meetings or within council business more generally. It is the vision of the council to promote their voice and active presence within the council activities and the community more widely. Importantly it is an aspiration of the council to support young people in the promotion of their own voice and influence in their community through legitimate processes such as committee activity and local development projects. Whilst young people under the age of 18 are not permitted to be councillors, other opportunities are likely to materialise for them to have a voice and active presence in the community. This is where they can have an impact on those who hold power and resources during transformation of the community they may continue to live within for years to come. We hope the implementation of this strategy will foster the continued support for the area from young people over a long period of time as they become adults and later contribute through their business, profession or use of personal time. We therefore see potential for the strategy to foster long-term and life-long commitment to our community, its transformation, and the wellbeing of its citizens during times of change and uncertainty.

PURPOSE AND GOALS

Purpose and goals, or even aspirations can be developed over time subject to periodic review. In their current form they generally embrace the character of the local community, its potential opportunities and well established key virtues of young engagement. The focus of the strategy is envisaged to always have the interests of young people and their community at its core. Some of the points below are well established within inner city and rural international and national youth outreach and engagement strategies. Outreach is often an essential and key part of youth community engagement. Over time its envisaged that young people, the community and council will contribute to the development, enhancement and reinforcement of goal and purpose.

- Develop an outreach programme with young people and the community
- Provide regular opportunity for a youth voice in the community – a youth council
- Promote key youth roles in the community and its development
- Facilitate youth skills improvement through engagement within activities
- Support opportunities for enhancement of youth well-being
- Share community benefits and influence long term decision making
- Celebrate the contribution of young people to the community
- Support access to local businesses and entrepreneur's
- Support access to events and contacts in education and sports
- Provide a platform for accessing volunteering and valuable experience
- Support young person's perspective/influence across council committees/activities; and where possible Solihull MBC and the region

ANTICIPATED BENEFITS

Outreach activities are essential to the development of a youth engagement strategy as such a strategy can only be well created and evolve through well engaged outreach with stakeholders: their



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views and opinions are essential as the general idea is the strategy then becomes owned and supported by those with a stake within its development as they will hopefully have recognised what's important to them is represented within it. Benefits or outcomes may change over time as the implementation of the strategy develops however there are many possible benefits that may result from this strategy over time, depending on its steer, community need, and support for the strategy. Here we promote some ideas that are likely to gain support at this stage considering some prevailing local and common issues influencing the lives of young people in the short or long term. These could be formally adopted as key aspirations for positive benefits and outcomes for young people because of work undertaken within the scope of this strategy:

- Focus on enhancement of general wellbeing through social and relational engagement- promoting opportunity for involvement in social activities and skills development
- Gain inclusion in debates on topics like community need, the Local Plan, the NDP, local park development, youth activities, crime. More specifically, affordable housing, community development and antisocial behaviour
- Have an opportunity to enhance the cultural, sports and creative interests of the community through its many annual events already in existence or through the creation of new events with youth involvement in the development of them.
- Promote low risk lifestyle choices and habits that might otherwise threaten the wellbeing of youth in the community. This could be via access to positive experience and role models that might redirect them from problematic drug use or behaviour, to positive activity and interests
- Gain experience, knowledge and understanding of working in groups, council interest group areas, community activism and political debate
- With all the above, we hope in some way to use the strategy to nurture and enhance employability and career interests of young people
- Act as an opportunistic vehicle or catalyst to promote positive mental health and respect for the dignity and values held by young people
- Share learning from this strategy with local Parish, City or County Council's; and vice versa. This open and co-operative approach might further benefit young people in this parish or promote opportunities for them beyond its boundaries

GENERAL NEXT STEPS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

- It's essential to develop an outreach strategy
- Learn from case studies from other village/city proximity population areas that are like Balsall Common
- Scope support available from SMBC youth services and Police Commissioner/service
- Understand youth support available at local schools; and wellbeing needs
- Consider and agree age range focus on (e.g. 11-18)
- Gain young person's views on NDP, SLP and other developments (e.g. Willow Park)
- Develop some initial ideas around engagement activities and tease out whether the focus of this strategy is fit for purpose
- Check whether young people on the BPC Youth Council will have access to the Police and Crime Commissioners, SMBC forums, mentors and training



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- Seek training and support to develop safeguarding policies linked to this area of council activity

Key Activity 1: Social Media and Remote Interface

For initial inception of the strategy it is expected that Balsall Parish Council will use its updated Facebook page and any other social media platforms and online links it has at its disposal to promote volunteering and work experience opportunities that young people can choose whether to use or not without commitment. There are likely to be safeguarding considerations if young people were potentially interacting with adults on a Facebook page for the council so this will need some consideration. Young members of the community will be encouraged to engage with this platform of the council as part of its youth outreach: this will become a method of gaining views and ideas of young people (registered users) via surveys or blogs. Youth strategy news will be on the Facebook and council website.

Key Activity 2: Development of Youth Council Group for Balsall Parish Council

Youth council groups are becoming more common within the UK and more widely within the international arena, but often they have a specific focus that can include types of service user, have political theme, or something else that meets a community need. Organised meetings and groups with terms of reference and formal agency support for young people commonly aim to offer a consistent platform for their voice. They are frequently called 'youth councils' as they act upon democratic principles and rules of engagement to represent their voice to receptive supporting organisations, including those that might have helped to form the council (e.g. local authority). However, they are not part of a formal Parish Council with power and responsibilities enshrined in law and supported by governmental guidance. Nevertheless, we propose that we develop a young council group that maintains a very close relationship with lines of communication with Balsall Parish Council, and receives resource support (financial, organisation and expertise) from it. Terms of reference will be required however we anticipate the following is likely to features as part of them:

- Develop the pilot group that will take a view on what's important to young people
- Share key council business with the group and seek their views represented by a remote or physical presence in council groups (e.g NDP, Communications Group; Willow Park Group): the goal is the inclusion of their voice.
- Where possible facilitate skills and experience develop of young people
- Meet as a group a few times a year and link with schools and undertake necessary DBS checks for helpers with his process
- Evaluate group and consider expansion to Berkswell and other areas

Key Activity 3: Develop financial plan

The young strategy and outreach programme will require financial support. Liaison with the council over finance will be ongoing although advice on development of the programme will be sought from other agencies with experience of youth outreach to ascertain a realistic financial commitment.

Key Activity 4: Outreach Strategy and Development

- Engage in outreach to youth via schools, universities, and other community groups
- Scope possibilities for community supported events (e.g. sports events)
- Develop communications with young people and vice versa to Balsall Parish Council
- Seek advice and development support from councils that can share experience of youth council and outreach strategies



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- Canvas views from key local sporting clubs (e.g. TKD, and rugby), social clubs (e.g. Guides, Scouts) and religious groups
- Provide youth space at council community engagement events so they can be present

Balsall Parish Council resolved to:

1. Support the acceptance of this youth engagement strategy in its entirety which will be explicitly outlined with a timescale for completion)
2. Agreed to a minimum of an annual review with the option of regular reports to council or on an ad-hoc basis to the council (to be decided)
3. Support the provision of financial and organisational support from the council for activities including young people or led by people, and those aimed to engage young people
4. Support the motion to adopt the strategy and council and to primarily engage young people aged 11-18