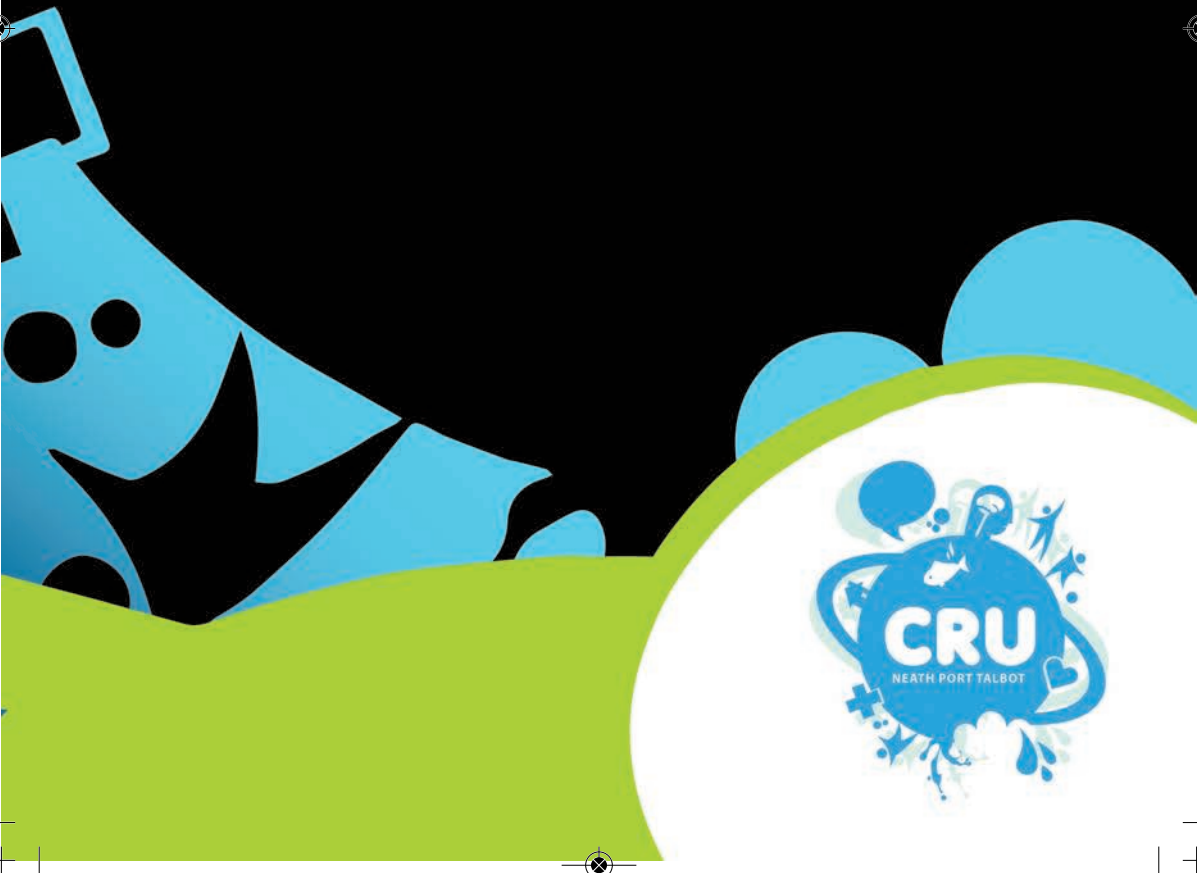


Town & Community Council Guide to

YOUTH REPRESENTATIVES AND PARTICIPATION





Contents

- 1 Introduction**
- 2 The Importance of Young People**
- 3 Young People: Participation**
- 4 Benefits**
- 5 Barriers**
- 6 Planning**
- 7 Finding the Right Young Person**
- 8 Success Stories**
- 9 The Impact**
- 10 Helpful Tips**

Introduction

Young people can make a positive contribution to council business, they are the leaders of the future offering a fresh perspective, passion and enthusiasm and can be a real asset to the community.

This guide has been produced to help you make a decision as to whether or not you should have a youth representative sitting on your council. The guide has also been designed to help you recruit a young person, communication tips and highlights the benefits to the young person and your council.

Neath Port Talbot Children's Rights Unit have produced this guide in association with Harri Evans-Mason who is an active youth representative on Pontardawe Town Council and Trustee of the Children's Rights Unit. The guide has been put together by experts in the Children's Rights field. We hope this guide will support you in choosing the right model of engagement for you in your journey in involving young people in your council's business.

The challenges to involve young people in local democracy and decision-making (from youth projects and school councils to local youth councils) are many and varied. Despite this, there is a clear appetite to effectively support the participation of young people in local democracy and decision-making.



The Importance of Young People

Why should my local council bother?

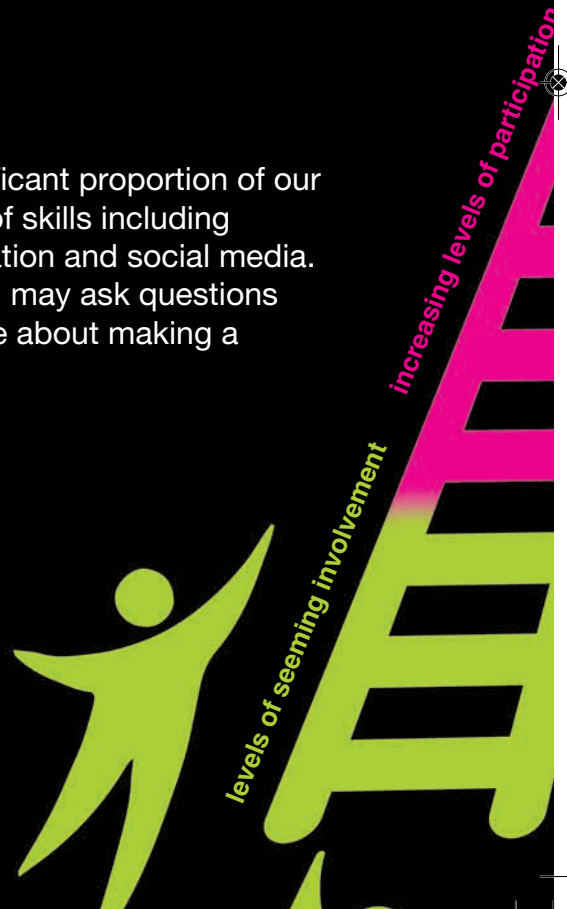
Nobody knows about the issues affecting young people better than young people themselves. Youth representatives can act as a positive way of integrating the views of young people into the local community.

Young people have rights...

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) states that all children and young people have the right for their voice to be heard.

Benefits young people bring

Young people represent a significant proportion of our community, they have a range of skills including design, technology, communication and social media. They have a different viewpoint, may ask questions others won't and are passionate about making a difference.



Young People: Participation

Are you utilising young people and making them a part of it?

The ladder of participation is a model developed by Hart (1992) which identifies eight levels of children's/young people's participation in projects. It is designed to encourage those working with children and young people to think more closely about the nature and purpose of children and young people's participation in community activities. Below is the participation ladder...



- 8. Young people's initiative, decisions made in partnership with adults**
- 7. Young people's initiative and leadership**
- 6. Adults' initiative, joint decisions**
- 5. Adults make decisions, young people are consulted and informed**
- 4. Young people are assigned tasks and informed how and why they are involved in the project**
- 3. Participation for show - Young people have little or no influence on their activities**
- 2. Decoration - Young people help impliment adults' initiatives**
- 1. Manipulation - Adults use young people to support their own projects and pretend they are the result of young people's inspiration**

Benefits to You and Them

YOU	THEM	COMMUNITY
Improves relationships and trust	Improves self esteem and confidence	Improves partnership working
Improves services	Improve CVs and Educational Attainment	Improved community cohesion
Understanding of social media and new ways of communicating	Greater engagement in politics and Active Citizenship	Develop intergenerational relationships
Understanding of the 'Youth of Today' and the service users perspective	Develop new skills and gain experience	Social action inspired by energy of youth
Social action inspired by energy of youth	Increased maturity and knowledge when decisions need to be made	Increased public confidence in Council

Many people would say that having a Youth Representative is a 'win-win' situation

Barriers to Engagement

	BARRIERS FOR COUNCIL	BARRIERS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE
Language	Requires new communication skills	Jargon is hard to understand
Perceptions	Intimidated by preconceptions of youth	Intimidated by anticipated authority of adults/age discrimination
More Work?	Concern that it will involve extra work	School work load is already enough
Time Frames	What if young people don't want to commit long term?	Impatience and the desire for things to happen more quickly than is always possible
Why Now?	Why involve young people in politics if they are too young to vote?	I can't even nominate myself to be elected onto a council until I'm 18
Long Meetings	The meetings are necessarily long, and involve bureaucratic processes – surely this isn't relevant or interesting for young people	What if I get bored?
Specialist Skills	Will I need any specialist skills or professional training to carry out this work?	Do I have any unique skills/knowledge to offer?
How?	How will we find young people to talk to? Where do they hang out? How do we reach them?	How will I know when meetings are happening? Who will let me know? How will I get there?

Planning

Ask yourself the following:

Is there currently any youth provision in your area?

How many young people (aged 11-18) live in your town or community?

Have you already got links with local youth work/education providers?

What resources do you have to engage with young people?

Where else do young people hang out?

What methods could you use to consult with young people?

What issues could you engage young people in?

Finding The Right Young Person

It can be difficult finding the right young person.

Consider working in partnership with...

- **Secondary Schools**
- **College and FE Providers**
- **Youth Clubs**
- **Third Sector Provision**
- **Sports Clubs**

Consider advertising through:

- **Community Magazines**
- **Events**
- **Social Media**
- **Websites and online**
- **Community Meetings**
- **Visits to Schools and Youth Clubs**
- **Local Radio**
- **Competitions**

Create:

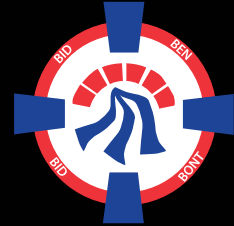
- **A role description outlining expectations**
- **A welcome/information pack with relevant documents**
- **Induction training, including meeting key people**



Success Stories

Pontardawe Town Council

Prospective candidates were asked to write to the Council explaining why they wanted to become a Youth Representative for Pontardawe Town Council and include any other details that the applicant thought was appropriate. References were not required.



Initial applications were reviewed by the Policy and Resources Committee who then shortlisted the applicants to four. The final four candidates were invited to the next full Council meeting and were given the opportunity to address Council. A decision was then made on the final two Youth Representatives to be appointed.

Voting was by a show of hands and the two representatives with the highest number of votes were appointed – each Member had one vote. In the event of a draw, the Chair had the casting vote.

The following criteria had to be satisfied before any young person could be appointed as a Youth Representative:

- **Candidates must be over 15 years of age but under 26 years of age at the date of appointment.**
- **Candidates must live within 3 miles of the Pontardawe Town Council boundary.**
- **Only two representatives may be appointed each calendar year.**
- **The calendar year runs from the 1st January to the 31st December.**
- **Youth Representatives may not vote on Council Matters.**
- **Youth Representatives must resign prior to standing for election or Co-Option to full Council.**

The Impact

YOUTH REPRESENTATIVES

Views from other angles

Increased social media appeal

Passion and Enthusiasm – fresh perspective

Representative of the community

Increased communication with young people in the wider community

Diversity

New schemes, e.g. 'Youth PACT' meetings

Empowerment – sense of ownership



Helpful Tips

- Encourage young people to arrive early so someone can welcome them and make them feel at ease
- Develop a mentoring role
- Provide Training – for both the young person and the Council
- Provide a brief summary of agenda items prior to the meeting
- Let the young person know that they don't have to speak
- Introduce the young person to all those that are present
- Provide information that is young person friendly and in plain English
- Keep young people informed at all times
- Post papers out in advance of meetings
- Treat young people with respect and make it clear what their role is
- Be honest and open about the time commitment

*We hope this information pack
has helped you with your decision.*



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