

Report to Cabinet

Subject: Gedling Borough Youth Council
Date: 13 February 2014
Author: Corporate Director (Stephen Bray)

Wards affected

Borough wide

Purpose

- To inform members of the progress of plans to introduce a Youth Council for Gedling Borough

Key decision

This is not a key decision.

Background

- 1 There is both anecdotal and statistical evidence that young people are increasingly less likely to engage with the democratic process. There is also a lack of a collective voice for young people to express their views about important issues affecting their futures and for local organisations to go through to engage and consult with young people about such issues.
- 2 During 2013, the Council, through the Policy Advisor for Young People and supported by the Corporate Director and the Elections and Members Services team, began discussions with the County Youth Service about how these issues might be addressed through the development of a directly elected Youth Council for Gedling Borough.
- 3 These discussions led to the development of a Youth Council “offer” which has since been the subject of discussion with the main secondary schools and academies in the Borough. A copy of the “offer” document is attached at **Appendix A**.
- 4 The Policy Advisor for Young People has provided verbal updates to Cabinet as the project has progressed. However, with elections now approaching, it is felt to be timely to report formally to Cabinet on the proposal and how it will be progressed.

Proposal

- 5 The Youth Council will be an elected body consisting of students elected at the Borough’s main secondary schools/academies. Each secondary school/academy
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within the Borough has been invited to elect three youth councillors, irrespective of the size of the school. Youth councillors will serve a two year term of office.

- 6 It has not at this stage proved possible to progress direct election at schools outside the Borough where Borough students attend. This is something which it is hoped can be addressed in future years but, to ensure young people from those areas are represented, arrangements have been made to co-opt young people from those areas (see below).
- 7 The objectives of the Youth Council are: -
 - To support and encourage young people's involvement in and understanding of democracy
 - To give young people a say in future issues affecting them
 - To act as a sounding board for the Council and other partners on key issues affecting young people
- 8 The Youth Council agenda will be set by the young people themselves, supported and advised by the Youth Service. The Borough Council will provide a venue for the Youth Council to meet (the Council Chamber) and provide ongoing administrative support for its operation.
- 9 The County Youth Service currently operates a series of young peoples' Scrutiny Advisory Development Boards across the county, one of which covers the Borough of Gedling. The Boards are not directly elected but do involve and engage with young people. The aim in the first instance is for the Youth Council to merge with the existing Scrutiny Advisory Development Board but, over time, it looks likely that the Youth Council will become a free-standing body in its own right.
- 10 Current members of the Scrutiny Advisory Development Board include young people from the Borough's northern parishes. Arrangements are being made for these young people to be co-opted onto the Youth Council - this will ensure that all parts of the Borough are represented from the outset.
- 11 It is suggested that the Borough Council should use the Youth Council as a sounding board to consult with on issues related to and relevant to young people - examples might include the Local Plan and the need to make budget savings. Content will need to be presented in styles and using techniques young people understand and relate to and the Youth Service will continue to advise and support on this. The Council will also need to listen and respond to issues raised by young people themselves.
- 12 The Council is also encouraging other partners engage with the Youth Council in this way and, in recent discussions, a range of partner organisation have expressed their willingness to do this.
- 13 Plans are now well advanced for elections to take place in schools towards the end of March 2014. Detailed arrangements for the identification of candidates, their promotion and electoral arrangements will vary between schools, but in broad terms all youth councillors will be directly elected by their peers. The Youth Service is offering training in manifesto development, drawing on considerable experience of this in

supporting elections to the national Youth Parliament, while the Borough Council is offering training and advice in the running of an election.

14 In many schools, sixth formers and other senior students are taking roles in the administration of elections, further raising awareness of democratic processes. The Borough Council will be loaning out various election materials to make the elections feel as realistic as possible.

15 Following the election, the first meeting of the Youth Council will be held in late April/early May. Further meetings will then be held each half term.

Alternative options

16 Various alternative approaches to elections and engagement have been considered. Detailed approaches to elections and engagement will vary between schools involved.

17 A further alternative would be not to develop a Youth Council but this would not deliver the objectives now being sought.

Financial Implications

18 Establishing the Youth Council so far has taken a considerable amount of officer and member time, with extensive engagement with schools that is continuing. On an ongoing basis, such engagement is expected to reduce and the day to day aspects of supporting the administrative requirements of the Youth Council can be contained from within existing agreed resources.

Appendices

Youth Council offer document – December 2013

Background Papers

None

Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended: -

(a) To note and support steps to establish a Youth Council for Gedling Borough

Reasons for recommendations

To support and promote engagement with young people on key local issues and with the democratic process.