



meeting **COMMUNITY SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE**

date **25th April 2005**

agenda item number

Report of the Assistant Director of Culture and Community (Young People's Division)

HEAR BY RIGHT – SETTING STANDARDS FOR THE ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN DEMOCRACY

Purpose of the report

1. To report an initiative (Hear by Right), which is designed to set standards for the active involvement of young people in democracy. The standards contained in Hear by Right were approved by Cabinet on the 8th February 2005 as an appropriate vehicle for the involvement of young people in Nottinghamshire County Council's services and activities.

Supporting information

2. Young people are young citizens of Nottinghamshire. They use the same services and have the same rights and responsibilities as other members of the community. If the County Council more effectively engages young people in the democratic process, its services will be improved and it will be seen to be delivering against the Government's agenda. The Hear by Right initiative is a tailor made package for engaging young people and represents an effective means of engaging young people, with a view to improving services for all local people.
3. Better Government with Young People is a joint initiative of the Local Government Association (LGA) and the National Youth Agency (NYA). The key aim is to increase children and young people's active involvement with local authorities and their participation in local democracy.
4. The first phase of the Better Government with Young People initiative was the publication of a set of standards for local authorities. These standards, published under the banner of "Hear by Right", encourage councils to consider and improve how they currently involve and engage children and young people in local democratic processes.

5. Over recent years, there has been a gradual shift towards the recognition that the role of young people in society should reflect the fact that they are active members of communities long before they are 18 and can exercise their right to vote. In this regard they use a wide range of services provided by local authorities and their lives are affected by the state of the environment.
6. Although services such as the Youth Service have consulted with young people for many years, the notion of seeking the views of young people and involving them in decision making has gained impetus through other initiatives such as Community Safety, Connexions, Best Value and Quality Protects. This, along with the move towards modernising local government, has led to an even wider agenda, which recognises that children and young people have valuable and interesting opinions that can help improve services.

The standards

7. In recognition of the increasing trend towards consulting and involving young people, the LGA and NYA have developed a set of standards for councils to aim for in terms of involving them in democracy.
8. The standards (which are attached to this report, marked Appendix A) are based on a self-assessment model and are divided into three levels: “emerging”, “established” and “advanced”. This represents the extent to which the active involvement of young people is built into a local authority’s processes.
9. The standards are designed to help councils to secure the long term and sustainable active involvement of young people in local democracy and to encourage continual improvement. They are not focussed on any particular age band and are designed to apply across all the various definitions of children and young people.

The case for involving young people

10. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child provides a set of principles and standards. Article 3 of the UNCRC states that all children have the right to express views on all matters concerning them and to have those views taken seriously. This baseline was endorsed in 1998, when the Human Rights Act came into force, making further rights available to young people, including respect for private and family life and a right to a fair trial.
11. Alongside the issue of *rights*, there are four other main rationales for involving young people in the activities of a local authority:
 - Because it could improve services.
 - Because young people will benefit.
 - Because democracy will benefit.

- Because Government is telling us to and we'll be evaluated against this area of work.
12. From the County Council's perspective, there are a number of more specific benefits, which can accrue:
- Acquisition of information from young people about how services perform and about barriers to access.
 - Services which are based upon real information about what young people want and need, and not assumptions.
 - Innovation – young people often think without boundaries.
 - Credibility amongst young people.
 - Development of young people, increasing their potential to take an active part in the development of communities.
 - Meeting the Government's agenda, including taking a role in community leadership outlined in the Local Government Act 2000 and responding to the Children Act.
13. There are equal benefits for young people and communities. For young people these include increased self-esteem as a result of being taken seriously. For communities these include more active involvement of young people.

Applying the standards

14. In a local authority setting, there are many areas in which young people could be involved.

Tasks which young people can be involved in		
Planning and Organisation	Doing and Delivering	Checking, Reviewing, Learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying the needs of young people. • Mapping and assessing other provision. • Defining critical success factors for a service. • Developing strategy and plans. • Recruiting staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing promotional materials. • Doing promotion work. • Facilitating access and outreach work. • Delivering services. • Brokering and linking services. • Advocacy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helping analyse performance data. • Evaluating performance and outcomes. • Accounting to various stakeholders. • Identifying learning points. • Getting information.

15. Naturally, a judgement will have to be made about what level of involvement is feasible, sustainable and acceptable, based on the following considerations.
- *The young people themselves* – skills and motivation levels.
 - *Elected Members and staff* – also, a matter of skills and motivation.

- *The context* – for example, the environment in which involvement takes place – Schools and Youth Centres as opposed to the Council Chamber.
 - *Attitude* – taking a positive attitude to young people’s involvement.
 - *The task* – making sure that the task is appropriate – high level strategy may not be a good starting point.
16. Clearly, these considerations in themselves will not necessarily ensure active involvement and some thought will need to be given to developing overall objectives. In this regard, the LGA and NYA recommend that “champions” are nominated at both senior officer and Elected Member level. In the County Council, the concept of members and officers acting as champions is currently the subject of discussion at Corporate Management Board. In consequence, it is not recommended at this stage that Hear by Right champions are nominated and that this issue is revisited when appropriate.
17. It is also suggested by the NYA and LGA that authorities involve young people at the earliest stage of defining the issues and tasks for active involvement, preferably through a reference group. Equally, a high level commitment is also crucial if the County Council is to ensure that this initiative is to be integrated into the mainstream of planning and delivery of services.

Outline strategy for adopting the policy in Nottinghamshire County Council

18. At the meeting held on the 8th February 2005, the Cabinet approved the adoption of the standards set out in Hear by Right as the appropriate vehicle for the involvement of young people.
19. As part of this approval, Cabinet asked the Young People’s Division Youth Engagement Team to conduct the self-assessment process. From this exercise, a judgement can be made about the appropriate level for County Council to engage with the standards.
20. From this self assessment the Assistant Director for the Young People’s Division will produce an action plan for implementation of the standards at the identified level.
21. Lastly, Cabinet agreed to revisit the notion of nominating champions in the light of the eventual recommendations of Corporate Management Board.

Statutory and Policy Implications

22. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, equal opportunities, personnel, crime and disorder and those using the service. Where such implications are material they have been described in the main body of the report.

Financial Implications

23. There are no financial implications arising from the report.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee note the report and receive a further report when the initial self assessment has been completed by the Assistant Director, Young People's Division.

**Anthony May
Assistant Director of Culture and Community
(Young People's Division)**

Legal Services Comments

The adoption of the principles set out in the report and the recommendations are within the authority of Cabinet.

The proposals form part of the Government's national programme requiring "whole system change" that "will place children at the centre of our policies." In addition to revised legislation and process, the government expects "fundamental cultural change". Children and young people, through the Children and Young Person's Board and other initiatives, have informed the approach of the Government in preparing recently enacted legislation and published guidance.

The office of Children's Commissioner established under the Children Act 2004 will have a general function to promote awareness of the views and interests of children in England and Wales and in particular to "encourage persons exercising functions or engaged in activities affecting children to take account of their views and interests."

Proposed national arrangements if implemented would involve all new legislative proposals and policy initiatives whatever the area of activity to be accompanied by a report indicating the likely effect upon children and young people.

Effective involvement of children and young people to the extent that they may influence issues that impact on their interests and well-being will improve the quality of the judgements reached and the soundness of decisions taken. Failure to integrate effective arrangements may also in future be more likely to expose decision making to legal challenge.

In areas already requiring involvement of children and young people, a distinction has been drawn between 1. ascertaining views, and 2. ascertaining wishes and feelings. The latter is clearly a more sophisticated and complex

exercise that requires careful attention to the means by which children and young people who by reason of disadvantage, disability, age or lack of skills are difficult to access or engage.

There are no other legal issues arising from the report that require specific comment.

Director of Resources Financial Comments (CC/RWK)

None

Background papers available for inspection

Hear by Right, published by the Local Government Association and the National Youth Agency, July 2001 – LGA Reference Code F/84

Electoral Divisions affected

All electoral divisions