

Report to the Education and Vulnerable Children Overview and Scrutiny Committee

23 March 2015

Rights and Participation Service

Engaging children and young people in care within the scrutiny process

Purpose of the Report

To explore how scrutiny can more confidently identify and prioritise issues important to children in care and care leavers.

Scrutiny chair and colleagues requested ideas and the support from RAP Service to better engage with children in care and develop a culture of listening that would overtime increase children and young people's participation within the scrutiny process. This report will suggest a number of models and approaches (building on national examples of engagement) that will support scrutiny to better hear the voice of children in care.

Background

Scrutiny is an essential part of ensuring that local decisions are effective and accountable. Involving young people in scrutiny brings a different perspective on how well public services are delivered and how they could be improved. Young people can comment and offer their views on services from their perspective as well as contributing ideas for the future of their communities and Birmingham generally.

This scrutiny recognises that we need to go beyond traditional approaches in order to engage on a broad range of issues. Working with Rights and Participation will ensure that we recognise our corporate parenting responsibilities and bring children in care and care leavers to the forefront of our discussions.

Options

- Scrutiny will work towards identifying a scrutiny topic that is proposed by children in care. (We will work alongside Corporate Parenting Board and our Safeguarding Board to maximise a positive outcome)
- We will identify themes and approach existing young people's groups to gather their views and responses.
- We will explore and plan a young people's led scrutiny working alongside the Children in Care Council.
- Scrutiny will ensure that officers when presenting information are routinely asked how their service impacts on children in care (recognising and documenting their corporate parenting role)
- All work stream areas identified at scrutiny will include a request to officers to include data and evidence relating to our in care/care leaver population.
- Services will be asked to explain and share how the child's voice is embedded within service design, delivery and improvement

Recommendation

That Members note the information contained in this report

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List of Appendices

How can overview and scrutiny committees involve young people in their work?

'Tomorrow's people? A guide for overview and scrutiny committees about involving young people in scrutiny' looks at why involving young people is important, and the role that scrutiny committees can play.

While the report found that a great deal of good work already exists, it recommends that councils will need to go beyond 'traditional approaches' if they are to engage with young people on a broad range of issues.

"... the panel is a brilliant opportunity to express what we feel is important and to scrutinise what we want changed and improved".

A member of the Youth Scrutiny Panel at Westminster Council.

Tomorrow's people? A guide for overview and scrutiny committees about involving young people in scrutiny.

The guide goes on to show how youth engagement can feature in the scrutiny cycle and gives tips for involving young people. There are six case studies examining how young people have been involved in the accountability and review of health, anti-social behaviour, crime and deprivation. These are drawn from active scrutiny development areas being supported by the Centre for Public Scrutiny.

Other examples include Buckinghamshire County Council. Members of the Overview and Scrutiny committee spoke to young people and found that while there were several examples of good practice, youth engagement could be improved through a more coordinated approach.

[Read the report of this experience on the Centre for Public Scrutiny website.](#)

In Hackney, the council enabled young people to form a scrutiny review team which spent a week examining how young people were engaged with local democracy in the borough. Their work included a survey that went to all pupils in the borough, interviews with key councillors and officers, a focus group and a presentation to the full council.

The highlights of the process were captured in a video. In this the young people explain what they did and demonstrate how they gathered evidence and questioned a range of people, including councillors, officers, and external agencies, including the Electoral Reform

Commission. The video outlines their recommendations following the scrutiny review, such as appointing local democracy 'champions'.

[Read the report and watch the video on the London Borough of Hackney website.](#)