

City of Edinburgh Council

10.00am, Thursday, 22 September 2022

Young People's Assembly

Item number
Executive/routine
Wards
Council Commitments

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 Council is asked to:
 - 1.1.1 Note the range of youth participation work.
 - 1.1.2 Instruct officers to continue with planned developments, incorporating feedback from third sector providers, elected members and young people.

Amanda Hatton

Executive Director of Education and Children's Services

Contact: Lorna French, Acting Head of Schools and Lifelong Learning

E-mail: Lorna.french@edinburgh.gov.uk

Report

Young People's Assembly

2. Executive Summary

2.1 This report focuses on:

2.1.1 The mechanisms in place and being planned which could be developed to promote the participation of young people in the city and their ability to influence decisions that affect them.

3. Background

- 3.1 A motion at Full Council in June 2022, submitted by Councillor Macinnes, requested 'a report within two cycles on how we can quickly set an effective Young Person's Assembly in motion'.
- 3.2 A number of mechanisms (outlined below) have been used to encourage the participation of young people in decision-making and to gather their views on selected topics of interest and concern to them.
- 3.3 Much of this work may meet the requirements of a Young People's Assembly. In addition, work is underway to scope and develop a Young People's Liaison Group (working title).

4. Main report

How we currently engage with young people

4.1 Previous work, including What kind of Edinburgh?, YouthTalk and Young Edinburgh Action, and ongoing work to support the Rights Respecting Schools programme and pupil participation are summarised in the following reports:

[Children and Young People's Participation March 2020](#)

[Children and Young People's Participation October 2019](#)

Currently, as well as the above, young people are participating/have participated in the following:

4.2 **Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP)** - The SYP represents Scotland's young people. Democratically elected members listen to and recognise the issues

that are most important to young people, ensuring that their voices are heard by decision-makers. All young people aged between 14 and 25 can stand for election to the SYP and all young people aged 12 to 25 are able to vote.

SYP elections were held in November 2021. Eleven candidates were successfully elected and a twelfth MSYP has recently been added.

Eleven MSYPs attend City of Edinburgh Council schools, eight are young women and three are from a Black and Minority Ethnic background. The MSYPs are being supported locally to engage with young people and decision-makers in their constituencies and across the city. The SYP also campaigns at a national level including, successfully, on free public transport for young people, free period products, marriage equality and votes at 16.

- 4.3 **Pupil Councils** – All schools have pupil councils, or an equivalent, with a wide range of models and approaches in place to ensure that pupil voice plays a key part in school life and in decision-making. Some are run on more traditional grounds, with pupils elected by their peers, whereas others allow pupils to work on specific projects such as the design of library spaces or take part in enquiry-based or evaluative work.
- 4.4 **Climate Change/Net Zero: Youth Climate Action Summit** - As part of the development of the City Sustainability Strategy, we hosted a Youth Climate Action Summit in February 2020 with more than 100 S1-S3 young people. On 13 October 2021, a follow-up event for primary-aged children took place online. 500+ children took part from 22 primary schools. The children were asked to discuss two questions: what actions (if any) are you taking within your primary school to help tackle climate change? and, what would you like to see your school do more of to tackle climate change? Their responses were collated and each school was asked to devise an action plan on what they will do to help tackle climate change.
- 4.5 **COP 26** - In October 2021, 12 students from six high schools took part in an online session to gauge their views on COP26 and climate change. They were asked how they felt about COP 26 and climate change, whether they planned to have any involvement in COP 26 and, if so, what schools could do to ensure they are safe. The young people were sceptical about COP 26. They expressed frustration about the lack of urgency about climate change. Climate change is an issue about which they feel strongly and they argued that schools could do more to raise awareness. Most proposed to take some form of action during COP 26 and planned to protest whether or not they had permission.
- 4.6 **1.5 Max** - With funding we secured from YouthLink Scotland, Edinburgh schools have developed the 1.5 Max project which is an international online and classroom-based climate education initiative. This involves young people and schools from across Scotland and from Malawi and Nepal working to prepare a summit in early November.

- 4.7 **Young Persons' Equalities Coordinators.** One of the key actions of the Education Equalities Steering Group was to ensure that pupil voice was represented in Equalities work in every school. As such every school now has a Pupil Equalities Coordinator. In June 2022, young people in pupil-led equalities groups met to share ideas and explore what support they need. A small core group of secondary pupils met to plan the events. 39 schools and 122 pupils took part in the primary event; 10 schools and 45 pupils took part in the secondary event. General feedback from participants was very positive, they liked the opportunity to meet and share ideas.
- 4.8 **Young people and Covid** - In November 2020, 21 senior phase students from 14 high schools took part in an online consultation about COVID. The purpose was to find out from them how effective COVID messaging had been and how we could improve compliance with infection control measures. From this consultation, the following main points/next steps emerged:
- 4.8.1 All those consulted expressed anxiety about the future and its uncertainties.
 - 4.8.2 Compliance is generally good in school but less so, especially amongst younger students, at break times and before and after school.
 - 4.8.3 Mask exemption system needs to be reviewed and applied more consistently
 - 4.8.4 Make greater use of social media and 'influencers' that young people respect.
 - 4.8.5 There is a risk of 'Covid Fatigue' setting in. There was a sense that, for some, safety routines were maybe becoming a bit more relaxed and taken less seriously.

These findings were fed back to senior education managers and to the School Risk Timeline Review Group. Some of the young people also worked with Screen Education Edinburgh to make short videos highlighting the key points and these were shared widely with pupils across the city.

- 4.9 The approaches taken to date to promote young people's engagement in decision-making may already go a long way towards fulfilling the scope and objectives of a proposed Young People's Assembly. These are approaches which could be further developed. In addition, work is underway to scope out a Young People's Liaison Group (this is a working title). The preparations for this group relate strongly to a Young People's Assembly.

Young People's Liaison Group

- 4.10 **Aim:** Children and young people's voices have more strategic impact across the city.

There is a range of participation activity taking place and making a difference to establishments and services. There is still a need to consolidate this so that

children and young people's voices can have a more strategic impact across the city.

4.11 Participants: Children and Young People

An option under consideration is to set up a children and young people's liaison group, inviting Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament, young people from the Champions Board, representatives from Pupil Councils, Equalities and Sustainability forums/groups and young people from youth work agencies. This group would act as a forum for feedback and liaison. Membership would be fluid rather than fixed and would depend on the specific issues being considered at the time. Young people would also bring forward their own priorities.

4.12 Participants: Adults

We envisage that the group could include elected members, senior managers and the Children's Partnership. There is room for some fluidity here too, for example depending on the issues being discussed, although it would be beneficial if there is also some continuity of membership so that relationships can be developed. Experience elsewhere in Scotland suggests that young people's participation works best when lead Councillors and senior officers take an active involvement in the process.

4.13 Structure:

Rather than one or two young people taking part in pre-existing, formal meetings – young people have told us that this can be off-putting – the group would meet in a 'young people-friendly' setting with an emphasis on dialogue and discussion. This approach would incorporate learning from activities such as Youth Talk and What Kind of Edinburgh? and focus on important issues for young people.

The group should meet at least twice each year, or as the young people feel is appropriate. There would also be a mechanism for young people who are not able to participate in the meetings to share their views/comment on proposals.

The aim is to have a pool of 50 or so young people with the participation of at least 20 at each meeting. We would aim for children and young people to outnumber adult participants in each session, hopefully in a ratio of 2:1.

The group would also liaise with the Children and Young People's Participation Board to plan activities, identify priorities and inform children and young people and staff about the issues discussed and next steps/recommendations for action.

The first meeting of the group would potentially involve MSYPs, Champions Board members, Equalities and Sustainability reps and young people from youth work agencies to participate on a broad agenda.

4.14 **First session**

(Baseline Data gathering)

A discussion with young people on their previous involvement in participation activities/forums at whatever level, focusing on what has worked well and what has been problematic. Adults would listen in to some of this discussion.

Adults would then outline what involvement the young people can have ('what is up for grabs?') and to identify strategies that are being developed or will be in the next year or so that children and young people might be able to play a useful part in shaping.

Children and young people would be asked to discuss which of these they would like to contribute to and if there are other issues that they want to put on the agenda. Future sessions can then be organised around these strategies and issues.

4.15 **Considerations for a Young People's Assembly**

In order for any Assembly to be effective, a number of factors would need to be taken into consideration:

4.15.1 Consideration needs to be given as to whether any Assembly would be an elected or co-opted body of young people or whether it would be a much more open mechanism that allows young people to contribute their views as and when they require or wish and on topics that are of interest to them.

4.15.2 An Assembly to which young people are either elected or co-opted would provide a defined group with which to engage. It would allow a relationship to be built with that group and offer a recognised and, after time, established mechanism.

4.15.3 An elected Assembly would, however, have a number of significant drawbacks. Firstly, it may be likely to attract a particular kind of young person who is sufficiently interested in, and confident enough, to participate in this kind of structure and who may be motivated to do so for reasons such as future career ambitions.

4.15.4 Secondly, young people grow up and move on quickly, meaning the Assembly's membership would change regularly and similar issues/concerns may repeat themselves as the membership is renewed. A more open structure could reduce the impact of this turnover.

4.15.5 Thirdly, an elected body would be exclusive in that only a small group of young people would be asked to represent their peers on a wide range of issues, thereby severely limiting the demographic. It would

also be a significant time commitment for those young people. The Scottish Youth Parliament already fulfils this function.

- 4.16 A wider mechanism that invites young people from a range of backgrounds, and/or targets young people from specific backgrounds, to engage in participation on particular topics of interest or concern to them is more likely to achieve a much wider demographic. It would offer a much broader representation of views and experiences, as well as being more inclusive, and would generate more informed and considered content and outcomes. Effective deployment of social media that young people use provides an opportunity to canvas regularly a wide range of opinion. Asking them to be part of an event or campaign, rather than a regular commitment, may also be more attractive to many young people.
- 4.17 A further consideration is that, in order for it to avoid tokenism, any such Assembly would need the full support and commitment of senior adult decision makers. Decisions with young people should be co-produced and would require adults to be honest with young people about why certain issues are difficult or expensive to fix. Similarly, adults need to be frank about what is 'up for grabs', i.e., which decisions can young people influence and which can they not? To what extent can young people set the agenda and to what extent are they being asked to comment on the adults' agenda?
- 4.18 A Young People's Assembly, in whatever form it may take, should be cross-sectoral, not just Council, and draw on the work of third sector and youth organisations. For example, the new Youth and Children's Work Strategy for Edinburgh, which is being developed jointly with LAYC and third sector partners, has children and young people's participation at its heart. Young people from across this provision, as part of the Strategy, should be invited to contribute their views on the most effective means for improving their political engagement.
- 4.19 In developing this work, we would also explore the option of consulting with the Edinburgh Association of Community Councils on amending the 'scheme for community councils (CC)', to ensure that young people had a stronger role within CC decision making, helping them to build on existing initiatives.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Agree the purpose of a Young People's Assembly and if existing or planned mechanisms such as the Young People's Liaison Group meet this.
- 5.2 Identify and agree, with third sector colleagues and young people, a further mechanism that could be deployed to improve the political engagement of young people.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 There is no requirement for additional resources for this work; costs are met from existing budgets.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 This report is specifically concerned with ensuring that children and young people's views and experiences are sought out and that their voices are listened to across services.

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 See 4.1

9. Appendices

N/A