

Forward Plan Select Committee

Tuesday, 28th March 2006

Requested Briefing Note

The Development of a Youth Parliament for Brent

- 1 The development of a coherent structure to give children and young people a genuine voice in the design and delivery of services is central to the effective implementation of the Children Act 2004 and the Every Child Matters: Change for Children Programme.
- 2 An audit of current arrangements in Brent has indicated that although children and young people are being involved and consulted, this is largely in response to key issues. Structures need to be put into place which gives young people genuine opportunities to participate and become involved in decisions regarding services which affect their lives. The review also highlighted the need for a more coherent and coordinated approach to participation with built in mechanisms to ensure regular feedback.
- 3 The findings of the review were confirmed by young people at the Participation Conference held in November 2005 where the majority of children and young people stated that the current mechanisms are not inclusive or effective. Young people expressed that the establishment of a local youth parliament would enable more children and young people to participate, have their voices heard and have direct links to decision makers in the council and its partners.
- 4 The Brent Children & Young People's Strategic Partnership Board adopted the '**Hear by Right**' Standards Framework in September 2005 following Member approval. The Standards, developed by the National Youth Agency are considered best practice to promote the participation and involvement of children and young people. Key features of the 'Hear by Right' framework include:
 - Children and young people are consulted and assisted in reviewing structures supporting their involvement;
 - A range of approaches are in place, both formal and informal, to encourage and enable participation of children and young people on their own terms and in ways that they feel comfortable with;
 - Structures that make sure a range of children and young people's views are built into decision-making;
 - Links with other groups and agencies are established and maintained to ensure the inclusion of marginal groups.

- 5 It is intended that a report on the establishment of a Youth Parliament for Brent will be presented to Executive in June 2006. The following work needs to be progressed before a report can be drafted:
- An analysis of youth participation structures in other authorities – we are receiving some support in this exercise from the Children’s Commissioners office.
 - An agreement on formal and informal structures that build on existing arrangements and enable young people to participate in ways in which they feel comfortable whilst providing a direct link to key decision making groups.
 - Develop terms of reference and membership of formal groups, including the youth parliament.
 - Ensure there are clear arrangements which gives a voice to the hardest to reach and most vulnerable young people, including: looked after children, children with disabilities, young carers and refugee and asylum seekers.
 - Develop mechanisms to ensure regular feedback to children and young people so that they know how their ideas and suggestions are being progressed.
 - Develop staffing structures which can support the effective participation of children and young people.

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