

**LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT**

**Meeting of Constitutional Working Group  
24<sup>th</sup> October 2006**

Report from the Director of Children and Families

For action: Approval Required

Wards affected: All

**Report Title: Development of a Youth Parliament for Brent**

**1.0 Summary**

- 1.1 This report seeks CWG approval for the establishment of a Youth Parliament in Brent in order to support the development of a coherent structure to give children and young people a genuine voice which is essential for the effective implementation of the Children Act (2004).
- 1.2 The recommended structure for consultation and participation builds on the positive work of existing forums with the aim of improving coordination, consistency and subsequent feedback mechanisms raised as an area for improvement within the recent Joint Area Review (JAR).

**2.0 Recommendations**

- 2.1 CWG is asked to endorse the Children and Young People's Participation Structure and approve the proposed remit and development of a Youth Parliament for Brent, with a review of the structure in January 2008.
- 2.2 With the development of the Youth Parliament the Children's Forum and the Youth Forum will cease to exist.

### 3.0 Detail

- 3.1 The active engagement of service users is a key element of the Children Act (2004) and there is an expectation that the local authority and its partners will encourage the participation of children and young people in the planning and management of services and activities.
- 3.2 The Brent Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Board adopted the '**Hear by Right**' Statement of Commitment in September 2005, following Executive 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 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.
- 3.3 The JAR Inspection report published in April 2006, noted that there were a good range of opportunities for children and young people in the borough to become involved with decisions that affect their lives but that these mechanisms were not robust, sufficiently coordinated or consistent. Additionally the inspection highlighted that while children and young people contributed to service planning, their involvement in evaluation of provision was uncommon and feedback about decisions taken was inconsistent.
- 3.4 There are currently a range of consultative and participation structures involving children and young people in Brent. All of these groups were established before the requirements of the Children Act were clear and prior to the establishment of the Children and Families Department and the Brent Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Board.
- 3.5 Existing consultative groups and participation mechanisms are listed below. They vary significantly in the actual involvement of young people, the type and level of discussions, frequency of meetings and

feedback to young people and the impact of their views on service delivery.

3.6 (a) **The Children's Forum** - this forum consisted of four facilitated events per year. It has not met recently (the last event was in November 2005) but the events and activities provided by the Forum have successfully contributed participating children's views on issues including Behaviour Support Plan and bullying. The Children's Forum steering group was chaired by an elected member and consisted of officers and partners. The current chair of the Children's Forum is Councillor Mary Arnold.

(b) **Brent Youth Matters 2 (the Youth Forum)** - this group is co chaired by a Member and a young person and in practice is seen as the umbrella organisation for other groups within the Brent Youth Service. The current chair of this forum is Councillor Hayley Matthews. Along with community and voluntary youth groups there are specific groups, including: looked after young people, young carers and young people with a disability. Brent Youth Matters 2 is a forum supported by the Youth Service. The name of the forum was developed in consultation with young people and they and the Youth Service are therefore keen to keep the name in some way or other. It is suggested that, in future, the name will be used for the umbrella group which comprises representatives of the youth groups supported by the Youth Service (as shown on the right hand side of the structure chart below).

(c) **Schools Councils** - most secondary schools and many primary schools have schools councils. These are local initiatives and whilst one off participation conferences have been held, borough level links between schools councils do not exist and there is no opportunity to feed into any council decision making process.

(d) **Housing Association Youth Groups** - these are active in some parts of the authority e.g. South Kilburn, but are not part of any borough wide participation structure.

(e) **Council Departments** - other departments including Environment and Culture, Housing and Community Care and the corporate centre consult or seek the participation of young people in a range of activities. These do not form part of any borough wide participation structure.

3.7 Although existing forums have had some success in achieving engagement of children and young people they have not been fully inclusive or representative of Brent's communities. All services have

to listen to the views of their users and current structures do not enable or encourage the majority of young people's voices to be heard. An audit of existing arrangements has highlighted the need for a more coherent and coordinated approach with built in mechanisms and systematic processes for regular feedback.

- 3.8 These findings were confirmed by children and young people at the Participation Conference held in November 2005 where children and young people agreed that the establishment of a local youth parliament would create more opportunities for them to participate, have their voices heard, and have links to decision makers in the council and its partner agencies.

### **Development of a Youth Parliament for Brent**

- 3.9 Building on the strengths of existing forums and with the aim of developing a participation mechanism which is inclusive and can impact service planning and delivery, the establishment of a youth parliament for Brent is proposed. Members of the youth parliament would be aged 10-19 and elected from 3 broad groups:
- Representatives elected from Schools Councils
  - Representatives from existing Youth Service groups
  - Representatives from Locality based youth groups
- 3.10 The model enables engagement of the most vulnerable children and young people as well as those accessing universal services. Each of the groups shown on Chart 1 will be represented on the Youth Parliament which will have a membership of 53 young people. Members of the parliament will be elected through a democratic selection process from within the existing groups. This will ensure that the parliament brings together a cross section of the borough's diverse young people with a range of perspectives.
- 3.11 Young children aged 5-9 will have an opportunity to meet with their peers across the borough in a larger group bi-annually to determine the areas they wish the Youth Parliament to discuss and investigate further. These events will be Member led, ensuring the effective participation of children under 10 and the transition of issues into the Youth Parliament. The Member will help to plan and structure the events, chair the discussion if there is one, take responsibility for ensuring that the views expressed are on the main Youth Parliament agenda and ensure that feedback on actions taken is provided to participants in the events. The views of children under five are important to inform service planning, delivery and review. Listening

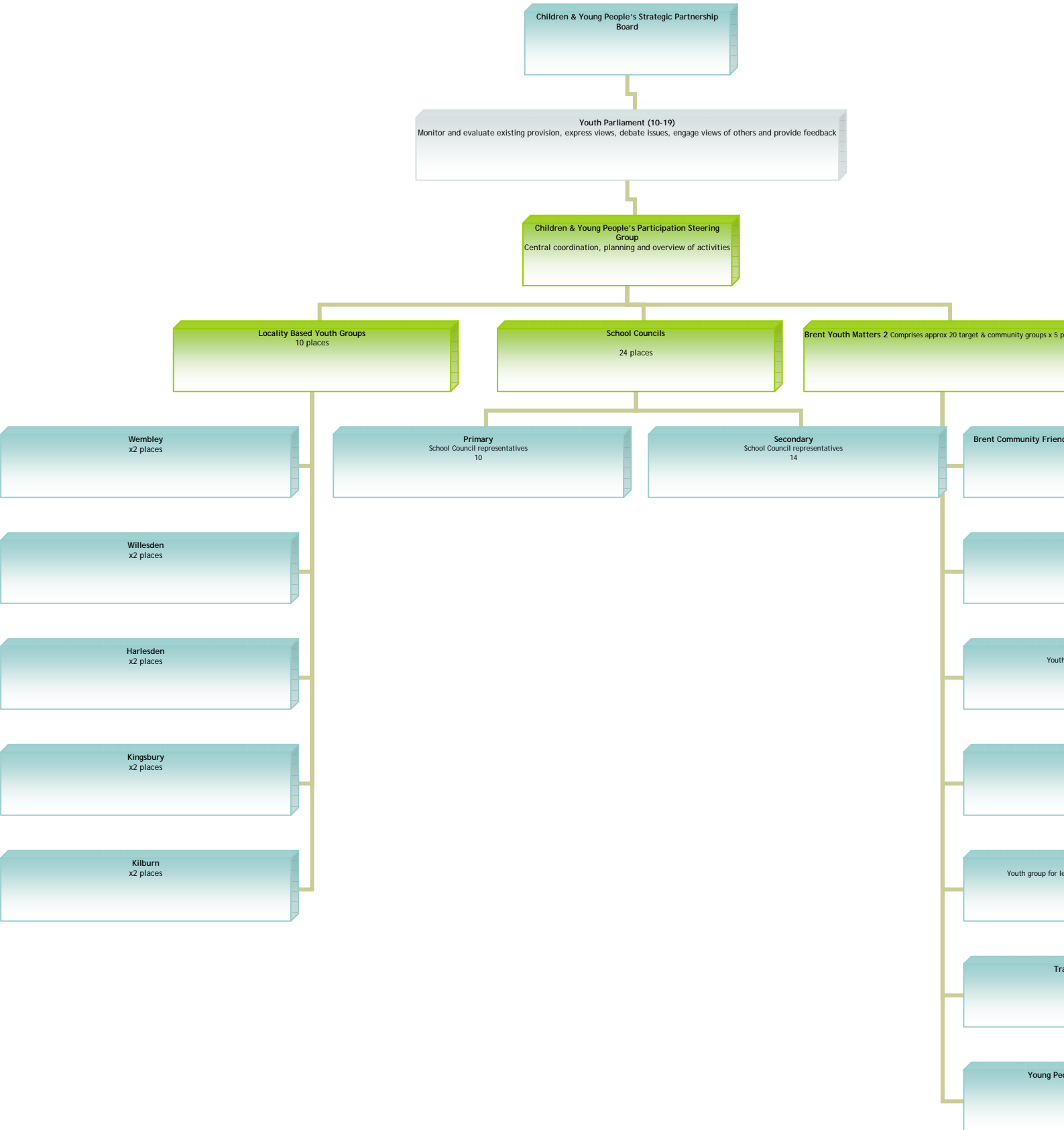
to young children will be facilitated through Children's Centres and through advocacy for under fives by the 5-9 year old forums.

3.12 The Youth Parliament is intended to be a vibrant and effective forum where all children and young people can debate and discuss issues that affect them, monitor and evaluate provision, get involved in decision-making, propose solutions and evaluate the impact of their involvement. It will achieve this by:

- Being representative of all children and young people in the borough with a substantial membership of 53 young people representing each of the forums within the participation structure.
- Having direct links with the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Board and the Council's Executive.
- Representing Brent young residents at national events and serve as Brent's youth voice on the UK Youth Parliament. (For more details please see Appendix 1).

3.13 Members of the Youth Parliament will agree an annual programme of activity and debate. Officer discussions with young people have indicated that some of the following areas are likely to be reflected in the work programme: sexual health, crime and safety, healthy lifestyles, school curriculum, extended services, environment and sports and leisure.

Fig. 1



3.14 The Terms of Reference for the Youth Parliament would be as follows:

- i. To discuss and debate issues that affect children and young people and explore potential solutions within the context of formal and informal meetings.
- ii. To represent these views and receive responses from the Council's Executive, Scrutiny and Children & Young People's Strategic Partnership Board.
- iii. To evaluate the performance of service provision, recommending areas for improvement in the context of the Children and Young People's Plan.
- iv. To plan two consultation events per annum for children and young people to raise awareness of issues as agreed by the Youth Parliament.
- v. To ensure that decisions taken as a result of young people's participation are fed back to young people through a variety of methods e.g. visits to schools, newsletters and websites.
- vi. Develop a training programme and materials for Youth Parliament members to enable effective participation.
- vii. To monitor progress towards implementation of the Hear by Rights standards across Council departments and other partner agencies represented on the Children & Young People's Strategic Partnership Board.
- viii. To consider possible options for the distribution of the Youth Opportunities Fund.

3.15 The Youth Parliament will be co-chaired by a young person (elected by all members of the Youth Parliament) and a Member. Both co-chairs will be members of the Children & Young People's Strategic Partnership Board. The Member leading the participation of children under 10 will be the co-vice chair along with a young person.

3.16 The role of the elected member co-chairing the Youth Parliament is to support the young person elected as co-chair to:

- Agree the agenda and annual work programme.
- Ensure that meetings are focused and are conducted in line with the terms of reference.
- Establish effective communication channels to the Council's Executive and Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership Board.

- 3.17 One full meeting of the Youth Parliament will be held every school term (3 per annum) with sub-groups meeting to progress actions and recommendations formulated at the full Parliament meetings as appropriate.
- 3.18 The work of the Youth Parliament and other forums within the participation structure will be coordinated by the Children & Young People's Partnership Steering Group. This group will comprise officers from council departments and representatives of partner agencies who work directly with the different groups of young people from which members will be drawn to participate in the Youth Parliament. The group will be serviced by a part time senior youth participation manager who will support the group to: map current and emerging forums for the participation of children and young people and to ensure the effective and inclusive engagement of young people in the Youth Parliament. The remit of the group will be to oversee, coordinate and scrutinise consultation, participation, and involvement of children and young people in the borough as well as implement and monitor the participation action plan to ensure a consistent, coordinated and complementary approach.
- 3.19 The structure and remit of the Youth Parliament will be reviewed and a report presented to Members in January 2008.

#### **4.0 Financial Implications**

- 4.1 Existing Children's Fund ring fenced grant will be reconfigured to create a part time post to support the Youth Parliament with running costs to be absorbed within existing Children & Families budgets.

#### **5.0 Legal Implications**

- 5.1 The Children Act 2004 is the legal framework for developing effective accessible services focused on the needs of children, young people and families. The Act places a duty on all agencies providing services for children and young people to agree joint arrangements which will improve the well being of children and young people. Plans must also be in place to ensure that service improvements are planned with the involvement of children, young people and their families through incorporating their views.



5.2 The rights of the child to be consulted and for their views to be acted upon are included in Article '12' of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

5.3 The National Service Framework for Children Young People and Maternity Services sets 11 standards for service provision to children, young people and maternity services. The key objectives of the Framework are;

- to put children and their families at the centre of care
- to develop effective partnership working so that the needs of children and young people are always considered
- to deliver needs led services

In meeting these objectives, it is acknowledged in the framework that active involvement of children, young people, and carers in design and development of services is paramount.

## **6.0 Diversity Implications**

6.1 The Children and young people's participation structure and development of the Youth Parliament will reflect the diverse nature of the community and will seek to ensure that all children and young people in the borough are given opportunities to participate and be involved in the design and delivery of services that meet their needs.

6.2 Hard to reach and vulnerable groups in the community will be specifically targeted in ways that are appropriate to avoid exclusion of any groups.

## **7.0 Staffing/Accommodation Implications**

7.1 A part time post of senior youth participation manager will be established to support the work of the Youth Parliament.

## **8.0 Environmental Implications**

Nil

## **Background Papers**

- i) Children Act 2004
- ii) The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 12)
- iii) 'Hear by Right', Standards for the Active Participation of Children and Young People - The National Youth Agency/ Local Government Association.
- iv) Brent Council's Consultation Strategy 2006-09
- v) Brent Children & Young People's Plan 2006-09

## **Contact Officers**

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## APPENDIX 1

### FIRST PAGE OF UK YOUTH PARLIAMENT WEBSITE



#### **About UK Youth Parliament**

We aim to give the young people of the UK, between the age of 11 and 18 a voice, which will be heard and listened to by local and national government, providers of services for young people and other agencies who have an interest in the views and needs of young people. UKYP has the support of Prime Minister Tony Blair, Leader of the Opposition David Cameron, and the Leader of the Liberal Democrats Menzies Campbell.

The UKYP has a rolling programme. We meet on an annual basis, and give the young people of the UK a chance to express their views and concerns at the highest levels.

The UKYP was launched at the House of Commons in July 1999. We held our first sitting in February 2001 in London.

**The 2006 Annual Sitting will take place in July (21-24) at Leicester University.**

Currently, we have over 300 elected MYPs, aged between 11 and 18 (inclusive). MYPs represent both young men and women, including young people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, and with physical and learning disabilities.

Each Local Education Authority (LEA) represents a UKYP constituency, and 90% of the LEAs across England are currently represented on the UKYP. Agreements are also established with Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to ensure that the young people in those countries are represented by the organisation.

Further details available on <http://www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk/>