

Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel

Date: 11 January 2023

Subject: Children and Young People's Participation and Engagement in Scrutiny

Lead officer: Jane McSherry, Executive Director of Children, Lifelong Learning and Families

Lead member: Cllr Brenda Fraser, Cabinet Member Children's Services

Contact officer: Keith Shipman, Head of Education Inclusion

Recommendations:

- A. Members to agree the proposed approach to young people's engagement in scrutiny
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1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1. The aim of this report is for members to consider how to enhance the council scrutiny function through the engagement of young people in the scrutiny process.

1.2. The Chair of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee would like to increase the democratic engagement of young residents in order to enhance the debate in scrutiny as a result of young people's feedback, and to increase councillors' engagement with young residents.

1.3. This proposal has been developed in discussion with the scrutiny team by the young people's participation service including the Young Inspectors.

1.4. The report recommends a model of attaching one Young Inspector to each scrutiny panel for a year. Young Inspectors are council employees whose role is to support the council to listen to and engage with young people. They will be supported by the Participation and Engagement service to pre-read all papers and discuss whether we have a view from young people or could engage with young people in items relevant to that meeting's agenda.

1.5. The scrutiny team will support the Young Inspectors to understand scrutiny processes in general, including each panel's role and function. In advance of meetings, the scrutiny team will also identify issues and processes that might benefit from young people's input to the Chair of each committee, and to the Young Inspectors. The Chair of each Scrutiny committee will meet at least annually with the linked Young Inspector and scrutiny team when agendas are being set, to discuss items that might benefit from input and how this might be achieved. This model of working will be reviewed by Chairs, Scrutiny and the Young Inspectors following one year of implementation.

1.6. The young people will not be members of the scrutiny committee but rather will attend as officers of the council with the specific remit of enabling the voice of young people to be heard.

1.7. To achieve this model, we would need to increase the contracted hours of the Young Inspectors and make it part of their contracts to support youth voice in scrutiny. We estimate that this would cost a total of approximately £1,000 per annum.

2 DETAILS

2.1. Increasing the participation and engagement of young people was raised by young people in the post pandemic young residents' survey, where they stated that they didn't feel sufficiently involved or listened to. This new role of supporting the Scrutiny process would form a response to the request of being more involved. The Young Inspectors currently each take a role in being champions for areas of the Merton Children's plan. It has been discussed with the Young Inspectors that they might also each be linked to the relevant scrutiny panel.

2.2. Scrutiny is a formal council function. The meetings can be long, late into the evening and are by their nature political. Young people's involvement should not be party political and all participation must be safe for the young person. The attendance of the participation team will support the young people and ensure their "safety" in the meeting, and getting to and from the meeting.

3 YOUNG INSPECTORS

3.1. Young Inspectors are young people with lived experience of services who are trained and supported by the Participation and Engagement team to further listen to and engage young people in services.

3.2. As an integral part of the Participation and Engagement team, we currently have four Young Inspectors who have wide experience of attending formal meetings to enable youth voice. We are recruiting four additional Young Inspectors to replace those who have recently left.

3.3. Young Inspectors are employed between the Education and Public Health teams on reduced contracts; those sitting within Education are contracted to work three hours per week, and those within Public Health are contracted to work six or twelve hours per week.

3.4. Young Inspectors have been involved in Merton's largest young residents survey, completed in 2021; the commissioning of services; speaking to young people and seeking their views on mental health and wellbeing; in addition to facilitating research as part of the Young Londoners Research Programme, funded by the Mayor of London.

4 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

4.1. The Overview and Scrutiny function was established within the Local Government Act 2000. It was set up to act as a check and balance between Executive Councillors who form the Cabinet and Non- Executive Councillors. The scrutiny function, although non decision making, enables non- executive councillors to scrutinise the Cabinet by investigating their decisions and policies, and making recommendations where any issues are identified.

4.2. At Merton, Scrutiny Panels recognise their important role in reflecting the concerns of the public. Suggestions from residents and local partners inform the work

programmes for the year. Directly involving young people in the work of scrutiny would support Panels in reaching a wider section of the community. The Young Inspectors in turn will also benefit from contributing to the decision-making process. Overview and Scrutiny is influential within the council and Cabinet do value and often implement Scrutiny recommendations.

5 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

We have met with the chairs and discussed this option. An alternative would be to recruit additional community volunteers to take a role in scrutiny. They would not be linked to the wider youth engagement work and would require additional support.

6 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

6.1. The Young Inspectors have had initial conversations about their involvement. They are positive about the proposal but want to see how it will work in practice and are cautious, citing previous work they have been involved in where they and the young people have read papers, attended adult meetings, but haven't been given the space to contribute meaningfully.

7 TIMETABLE

7.1. It is envisaged that this work would begin with the spring scrutiny meetings.

8 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

8.1. There is a financial implication of £1,000, which would enable the Young Inspectors to be paid for this work. The Youth Participation team will prioritise this work.

9 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

9.1. Not applicable

10 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

10.1. Not applicable

11 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

11.1. Not applicable

12 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

12.1. All engagement must be safe for the young person. The young people also have limited hours of work and other educational and work commitments. It may be necessary from time to time for them to attend on-line rather than in person.

13 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

12.1 Not Applicable

14 BACKGROUND PAPERS

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