

## **How 2 make the case for your youth council**

**Due to local councils reducing the money they spend on certain local services, your youth council may have had its funding reduced or even fully stopped, or face losing money.**

**You have the right to have your say on spending cuts affecting your youth council.**

**This guide explains how you can make the case for continued investment in your youth council.**

Spending cuts have affected services that young people use, including youth councils. On 20 October 2010, the Chancellor George Osborne revealed the Government's plans to make £6.2 billion of savings (cuts to the money the Government usually spends) in 2010 and 2011 to address the UK's national debt. Local councils across the UK are being told by the Government to save £1.166 billion. This means certain services are being reduced or cut by local councils because of decisions by councillors to spend less money on certain things, including youth services, to save money.

Often as part of their services for children and young people local councils provide youth participation structures that support young people to get involved in decision-making. These might be called youth councils, youth parliaments or youth forums (in this guide we refer to them as youth councils as a shorthand). Cuts made to youth service budgets have affected the staff and resources available for youth councils and in some instances have led to their closure. Also the Government has removed the 'ring fencing' of the Youth Opportunity Fund (YOF). YOF is money for young people to

control and decide how it was spent on projects to improve their local area and young people's lives. Before local councils got money from the Government for young people and they had to spend some of it on YOF, but now the Government has said they don't have to do this. Therefore many local councils have reduced the amount available to young people through YOF or cut the scheme. Seven out of ten youth councils were involved in running YOF for their area so this decision has really affected youth councils.

You can read about how other youth councils have been affected by youth service cuts at: <http://www.byc.org.uk/saveouryouthservices>

Since 2009 it has been law that local councils have a 'duty to involve' local people likely to be affected by, or have an interest in, the decisions they make. This means your local council has a duty to involve you in the decisions they make on the youth services you use.

### **The 'duty to involve'**

The duty to involve is a relatively new duty on local councils to inform, consult and involve local people likely to be affected by their actions. This duty is law – it is written in Section 138 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. This law took effect from April 2009.

Find out more here:

<http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelD=15391881>

You have the right to have your say on how your youth council is run and what cuts are made to its funding. Your local councillors need to take your views into account when they are making decisions that affect your youth council.

This How 2 guide will help you make the case for your youth council in the face of spending cuts.

### **Make sure you know all the great things that youth councils do across the UK.**

It's important to be aware of the value of the work that your youth council does. Below are some facts collected by BYC about local councils and the great things they do. You could use these facts to show how important youth councils are to communities and to demonstrate how your local area deserves a well funded youth council, like in other areas, so it can continue to have this kind of impact.

#### *Did you know...?*

- There are over 600 youth councils across the UK informing and influencing local decision-making. Up to 19,8000 young people volunteer their time as youth councillors. Up to 1 million young people took part in youth council elections in over 300 different locations in 2009/10.
  - Youth councils often act as hubs of youth representation in their local community. Often school councils and children in care councils are linked to, or combined with youth councils. Most Young Mayors and members of the UK Youth Parliament have places on youth councils as well.
  - Youth councils across the UK report their biggest achievements as:
    - Increasing children and young people's participation in decision making (89%)
    - Increasing their community's awareness of young people's contribution to their communities (75%)
    - Increasing the quality of youth services (62%).
- Significantly 22% of youth councils believe they have saved money for young people (22%) and their local council (13%).
  - Nearly nine out of ten youth councils, 87%, campaign on local issues – on causes from improving public transport to increasing the amount of recycling.
  - Compared to the UK population, young people from a wide range of ethnicities take part in youth councils. 25% of youth councillors are from a Black and Minority Ethnic ethnicity as opposed to just 3.7% of adult councillors and 8% of the UK population as a whole.
  - Over half (58%) of youth councils have done work to improve relationships between different age groups in their community and four out of ten (42%) have done work to bring together people from different cultures.
  - Youth Councils also work with other local community groups to carry out intergenerational and intercultural projects to develop strategies to strengthen community togetherness.

### **Collect the facts to make your youth council's case.**

Now you need to think of how your youth council makes a real difference to your local area and to your life.

Answer the following **10 questions** to build your case. You can then take your answers along when you meet with your local councillor about cuts to your youth council. Make sure you can give examples to back up your opinions. You might want to talk to youth

workers who support your youth council to get facts and statistics to back up your answers.

1. How does your youth council give a voice to young people in your area?
2. How many young people does your youth council involve and represent?
3. Does your youth council give young people who might not normally get the chance to have a say the opportunity to get involved?
4. What successes has your youth council had this year? Give an example of things that your youth council has done that have had a positive impact on your local area.
5. Does your youth council campaign on issues? How are these decided on? What successes have you had in campaigning on these issues?
6. Does your youth council manage its own budget or the Youth Opportunity Fund? How much money is this? How have you spent this and did it make a difference?
7. Have you done any work which has improved services for young people in your local area?
8. How are the cuts affecting your youth council and the young people who use it?
9. How has your youth council helped you or made a difference to your life? What skills or experiences have you gained?

10. What would it affect young people in your area if you were to lose your youth council? How would it affect you?

### **Challenge cuts being made to your youth council**

As well as making the case for the good work your youth council does it is important to think of what questions you can ask local councillors to challenge the decisions they may have made about cutting funding to your youth council.

As a youth council get together and brainstorm what questions you can ask to challenge spending cuts to your youth council. Examples of questions to ask include:

- Why did you make the decision to cut funds to our youth council?
- Why weren't young people consulted on these cuts?
- How are you going to ensure we can have a say through our youth council, if we don't have the staff and resources to support us to do so?

### **Take your case to the decision-makers.**

Once you have made your case you need to get it heard! You need to share the evidence that you have collected with the people who are making the decisions about how your youth council is funded – your local councillors.

You can find out who your local councillors are and write to them at: <http://www.writetothem.com/> to voice your concerns, present your evidence of why your youth council needs funding, and ask for a meeting to discuss the cuts. Make sure you include your address and postcode in your

email so you can show them that you are their constituent.

It is also a good idea to write to, or meet with, the Councillor in your local council who has special responsibility for children and young people. This person is likely to be called Cabinet Member for Children and will sit on the council Cabinet. The council's Cabinet is responsible for making recommendations to the whole council on the council's budget and what it spends its money on. It might be a good idea to ask this Councillor if they could come and meet with the whole of your youth council, for instance at one of your meetings, so everyone can present their concerns.

You can find out who this person is, and get their contact details, by going to your local council website and searching for information on the 'Council Cabinet'. You can find out what local council area you live in here: <http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DI1/Directories/Localcouncils/index.htm>

### **Share your stories with BYC**

As part of our Save our Youth Services campaign, we want to hear from you about how you are making the case for continued investment in your youth council.

Email [campaigns@byc.org.uk](mailto:campaigns@byc.org.uk) and tell us what reaction you received. Remember by speaking up for your youth council you are making a difference!

### **Where to find more information.**

#### **British Youth Council Save our Youth Services.**

Our campaign page to save youth services across the UK. You can read other youth council's experiences of cuts, submit your own story to BYC and read our campaign briefing on the issue.

<http://www.byc.org.uk/saveouryouthservices>

#### **Young Voices Stronger Together.**

This report shows that all over the UK there are enthusiastic young people in youth councils ready to make a difference where they live. It goes on to demonstrate some of the ways that they make a difference to their local communities.

## **For more information**

**about BYC training:**

[www.byc.org.uk/training](http://www.byc.org.uk/training)

**or to download further resources:**

[www.byc.org.uk/resources](http://www.byc.org.uk/resources)

## **British Youth Council**

**We empower young people across the UK to have a say and be heard.**

[www.byc.org.uk](http://www.byc.org.uk)

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