



Case study

power and influence

Bedford Borough Council | How much power and influence does the YVV have?

What?

A number of YVVs are involved in strategic decision making with Bedford Borough Council. This happens through YVVs in the borough being represented on a number of boards and bodies.

How?

Young people are represented on a number of boards and bodies by having two places as decision makers on these boards plus room for observers. They are able to make presentations representing their views and consultation results gathered from youth cabinet meetings, children and young people in the Borough. Additionally they have influence via the engagement officer.

- The Youth Cabinet is represented on the Children's Trust Board.
- The Children in Care Council is represented on the Corporate Parenting Board.
- The LINK Young Advisors are represented on the Healthwatch Steering Group.
- SuperKids Young Carers have influence at Carers Partnership Board via engagement officer representing their views / consultation results from SuperKids meetings / children and young people in the Borough.

There is an annual corporate management takeover day – where up to 10 children and young people shadow the Chief Executive and Directors for a morning in the council, taking part in their corporate management group meeting. In the afternoon the young people meet with different parts of the council to interview them on child and youth topics, they have a question and answer session with the elected Mayor and Portfolio Holders.

Every term there are meetings with the Elected Mayor involving children and young people representatives from strategic projects. At these meetings they raise issues, inform and find out what the Council is looking at next.

Consultations are carried out with children and young people on various topics, i.e. Vision for Education, housing strategy, HealthWatch, statement of community involvement. The information is then fed into the formal consultation and decision making process.

Outcomes:

Children and young people use their project meetings to start discussions with guest speakers that they have requested. This is followed up by children and young people being supported to attend and present at the strategic forums / board meetings. Partners appreciate hearing directly from children and young people where possible and also use the wider cohort to gather responses via consultation.

Young people from the youth cabinet directly challenged the Mayor on budget cutting decisions during their termly meeting with him. This led them to do a petition to save the service getting 400+ signatures that was presented to full council. Having access to senior leadership can mean that they hear first hand what the implications of decisions can be.

The challenge is always supporting decision makers to see past the young person and understand the participation process that lies behind. It might be the same child or youth representative that comes each time but they look to be the voice of children and young people, always coming prepared to represent the views of others as well as their considered opinions. We are developing different ways of providing the views of children and young people e.g. use of video messages in Corporate Parenting.

Impact:

We have evaluation discussions with the children and young people after each event, reflecting on what worked and what didn't, changing as needed. We track how their influence has affected a decision directly (which can be difficult) and work with partner agencies to measure the impact of children and young people influencing decisions.

Resources:

We always use the Democracy Cookbook as a way to discuss decision making and influence and how councils work, plus resources like Spice it Up (and the children's version) or Making a Change.

Learning points:

- Get officers and elected members to understand young people have a representative role and are able to represent the needs and wishes of others.
- Prepare briefing notes and summaries of board papers for the children and young people.
- Try and get more places for young people on boards so they have more mutual support
- Invite boards to meet in young people's space.
- Plan how you are going to track the impact children and young people have on decision making at the beginning of the process.
- Use doodle sheets and meetings cards for all board members to use (so children and young people don't feel different / or embarrassed) that help children and young people to stay focused, jot down questions or for chairs of boards to see if they need to stop, slow down or explain.