

involving young people in local government decision making

“The Youth Voice Vehicle”

Self Assessment Report

(July - August 2013)



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Introduction

The term Youth Voice Vehicle (YVV), and this self assessment process, came about as a result of the cross-government policy for young people aged 13-19 called 'Positive for Youth' published in late 2011 but promoted and developed throughout the year. This policy urges national and local government as well as other statutory bodies to listen to the voices of young people and engage them as partners in decision making.

Whilst the Government has left local authorities to decide for themselves how best to achieve this they want to be certain that all young people have access to an effective mechanism through which they can influence policies, services and decisions that affect their lives.

In order to do this it asked the British Youth Council (BYC) in 2011 to promote the involvement of young people in local and national decision making, to provide support to local authorities and young people with recommendations of how to do this, and to build on existing good practice. This included a way for local authorities and YVV's to assess their current arrangements.

In response to this the BYC's Youth Voice initiative, with local input, produced a self-assessment toolkit which was provided to local authorities to complete voluntarily and return to us during the summer of 2012. Following the success of the subsequent report BYC repeated the process in 2013. The first section of this report describes and analyses the results of these self-assessments from 87 local authorities, to provide an overview of how effective YVV's are across England, and provides a benchmark against which we can measure change, or offer support. The toolkit which included the self-assessment template also included an action planning template. Although this report will make some comparisons with last year's results it is important to bear in mind that with a substantially larger data set this year, and with some respondents providing results last year but not this year, direct comparisons between the two years need to be made and read with the consideration that some variation could be accounted for by the data set change. In order to address this, the second section of this report draws out the results from those authorities who did complete the toolkit for consecutive years. As a result it will be using a smaller number of authorities, 48, but it will enable a direct comparison between the two years.

Following this there will be a look at the results from a smaller "Snapshot" survey that was carried out in partnership with this work. This supplementary survey looks at the types of Youth Voice Vehicles which are currently in use across England.

Revised guidance for LAs on the role of young people in the light of Positive for Youth has also been published by the Department for Education in July 2012 which states the responsibilities of local authorities around involving young people:

Extract from DFE Guidance “Responsibilities of local authorities”

Involving young people

3. Local authorities must take steps to ascertain the views of young people and to take them into account in making decisions about services and activities for them, in line with Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). They should establish and maintain structured arrangements for doing so. To inform continuous improvement, these arrangements should enable young people to inspect and report at least annually on the quality and accessibility of provision. As appropriate they should also be involved actively in service design, delivery and governance. Young people should receive the support they need to participate, ensuring representation of the full diversity of local young people, and those who may not otherwise have a voice.

In response to this, BYC’s Youth Voice initiative will now produce a youth proofed version of the guidance and what it means to young people, explaining their entitlements to services so that LAs can use the existing structures to start to deliver on these commitments.

So the following summary, and detailed analysis of the self- assessments, will form the benchmark for subsequent years audit and comparison, using seven key standards.

Key standard areas:

1. Representativeness
2. Accountability
3. Sufficiency of support
4. Independence
5. Senior buy-in
6. Power and influence
7. Impact

Youth Voice Vehicle

The term Youth Voice Vehicle was coined to refer to the overall local authority body for both representing young people and consulting them, and may include a range of models developed over previous local administrations.

Most local authorities have a ‘Top-Tier YVV’ which is a body that covers the whole of the authority area and has a broad range of interests and groups represented. Others keep their special interest groups separate to feed into specific services, for example the children in care council might only feed into ‘looked after services’; others organise only at a local area level because of the size of the authority. Some are a mixture of the three models and others are ‘work in progress’ as they cope with the impact of re-organisation, change of priorities or lack of resources. Where this is the case we have asked that the YVV assessment is applied to the local authority’s overall strategy for youth voice, involving

young people from the range of young people led organisations that are in place. These can be elected, nominated or selected and include:

- Youth Council, Young Mayors, Youth Parliament, Youth Cabinet , Young Commissioners
- Disabled Youth Council, Children in Care Council, Youthbank
- Youth Steering Group Boards, Parish Youth Council
- School Councils network

Summary of Findings (2013)

The first thing to note is the nearly 20% increase in the total number of local authorities who completed and returned the self-assessment tool; from 70 to 87. This demonstrates a clear increase in buy in from local authorities and the recognition of the importance of assessing the real impact of their youth voice vehicles on a local level. The change and increase in the data set (the local authorities who took part) does mean that specific changes in figures between the two years could be accounted for by changes in respondents. Having said that, generalized views based on overall figures are still credible as they give an overview of last year in comparison to an overview of this year. This justification is also borne out by the similarity with the results in the “Year on Year” section. As such, the table below does give both years in order to present a guide to how the impact of YVV’s is developing.

The table shows the overall percentage breakdown for all of the 7 key questions. This figure is taken from the cumulative number of responses each of the ‘Best Practice Indicators’ received in each of the questions. Although the number of responses varied slightly between each question they stayed very close to the total number of overall responses: 87. The breakdown of each question in the following chapters describes a number of evidence indicators.

We have agreed *not* to name and shame authorities who are in the red category. The assessment tool allows for action planning to improve their amber or red status by accessing BYC or other training and support.

	Green 2013	Amber 2013	Red 2013	2012 Percentage of LA's that have something in place (Green + Amber)	2013 Percentage of LA's that have something in place (Green + Amber)
(1) Is the YVV representative of the youth population in the authority?	58.43%	36.92%	4.65%	93.53%	95.35%
(2) Is the YVV accountable to the youth population in the authority?	52.01%	41.95%	6.04%	92.08%	93.86%
(3) How independent is the YVV?	29.56%	36.95%	33.49%	64.06%	66.51%
(4) Does the YVV receive sufficient support from the authority to enable it to fulfil its role?	66.47%	32.93%	0.60%	91.03%	99.40%
(5) How much political and senior-level buy-in from the local authority is in place?	58.50%	31.87%	9.63%	89.18%	90.37%
(6) How much power and influence does the YVV have?	28.16%	57.76%	14.08%	81.10%	85.96%
(7) What impact does the YVV have on the policies and services for young people?	45.97%	42.49%	11.54%	86.18%	88.46%

- **Green:** in place and have evidence
- **Amber:** in place but needs some improvement
- **Red:** nothing in place (yet)

Conclusions

Representativeness

The report last year found that representativeness was the highest scoring area amongst the seven questions. Although this is not the same this year, it is clear that the vast majority of local authorities feel that their youth voice structures are representative of the youth profile in their area. Many local authorities have been developing youth voice bodies for many years and many include representation of minority groups interests. A comprehensive model is one of mixed elected representation and reserved seats for minority groups, whose profile represents that of the local youth population. The most obvious example of a minority representation are the children in care councils, but others have included disability, faith or young representatives from charities targeting the harder to reach.

Independence

The independence of YVV's is an area that the results still have again highlighted as an area that is in need of work. There are around a third of local authorities that had nothing in place to address the key indicators of independence which include 'does the YVV have its own bank account' and 'does the YVV's communications strategy enable it to manage its own media relations'. This is not entirely surprising as LAs are responsible for resourcing the youth voice vehicle, so ensuring its independence is something of a contradiction in terms. This was a conclusion that arose in the last report, however, we continue to include it to ensure that we are thinking 'to what extent are a group of young people being supported to be independently critical of a Local Authority', especially when they are invited to 'audit', 'scrutinise' or 'inspect' services, when they also depend on that Local Authority for funding and legitimacy.

Sufficiency of support

This is far and away the most positive aspect of this year's results with the highest percentage of evidenced (green) assessment by Local Authorities who believe they are providing their YVV's with sufficient support in order to enable it to fulfill its role. This is a claim that is supported by our other survey of structures¹, which shows that an average of over 99% of Local Authorities feel they have at least some system to ensure that their YVV's are set up and run effectively. This is in the context of cuts to overall services and restructuring of youth services, which are frequently relied on to support youth participation.

Accountability

¹ "A Snapshot of Participation Mechanisms in Local Authorities" – see Appendix 4

The overall level of accountability reported is high at nearly 94%, with around half of those that responded identifying their level of accountability as “green”. This theme was tested against questions about annual reporting, regularity of contact and communications.

Buy in

There was an overall positive score of around 90% of local authorities who scored themselves as either green or amber, with the majority of these being green. This is particularly relevant, and therefore positive, in terms of the sustainability of youth participation which is more likely when senior officials and councilors see its value and are prepared to support it with time and resources.

Power and Influence

The result for this, in terms of green and amber, was generally positive at around 85% but only around 28% saw themselves achieving this at the top level. This shows that the majority of local authorities are affording their YVV both power and influence but that there is still room for improvement on this.

Impact

Overall 88% believe that their Youth Voice vehicle has a positive impact on policies and services for young people. The other ratings are important in terms of seeing where specific areas of improvement can be made, or indeed areas of success should be shared and celebrated, but this is perhaps the most important in the terms of this work.

We conclude that:

1. We have built on the benchmark from last year with a drastic increase in the number of local authorities contributing to the report.
2. There continues to be a good set of best practice to share amongst all authorities
3. LAs demonstrate a commitment to an accurate assessment of both their strengths and weaknesses
4. There are overall very good levels of quality

Next Steps

1. Approach well performing authorities to gain and then share best practice.
2. Repeat the assessment in 12 months time.

Underlying Principles and Values of the Youth Voice Vehicles

The underlying principles of the Governments 'Positive for Youth' policy as well as YVV's are the engagement of young people in local democratic processes. This is so that young people have a sense of belonging, communities become stronger and the services that are offered locally have the best chance of making an impact. This policy and subsequent YVV assessment reflects the Government's commitment to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and their desire for every local authority area to have the best structures and mechanisms to enable youth involvement.

The self-assessment toolkit is underpinned by a set of principles which the BYC believes should inform the involvement of young people in the decision making:

- Young people have the *opportunity* to be involved in making decisions on what their involvement should be and which vehicle is used.
- YVVs should have a clear *vision and purpose*, shared by young people and understood by the local authority and support providers
- Local authorities should recognise the value of involving young people in decision making at a strategic level, and make *sufficient resources* available to support their involvement
- YVVs should be *inclusive* of young people from different backgrounds and with different needs, and should ensure that their ways of working do not exclude or discriminate against specific groups
- YVVs should be *representative of the diversity* of the young people living in the local authority area
- Adults involved in supporting, advising and liaising with YVVs should fully *understand and support the processes of young people's involvement*
- Young people should be involved in developing and deciding on appropriate *resources, support and training* required to establish a productive environment for young people's participation
- YVVs and local authorities should be *outward focused* and draw on good practice in other settings and organisations
- YVVs and local authorities should regularly *assess the impact* of young people's involvement to ensure that investment in young people's voice is making a difference to young people's lives
- YVVs and local authorities should be able to *articulate the benefits* they have seen from involving young people in decision making

Based on these principles the BYC identified 7 Key Questions for Local Authorities to test the strength of their youth voice arrangements. In the following chapters we will address each of these questions individually, starting with an overview of the indicators of best practice that have been designed by the BYC followed by an analysis of the results of the self-assessments.

How the YVV's were assessed

We recommended that the local authorities have a review meeting once a year which includes members of the YVV, the main support worker for the YVV and the person in the local authority who has the main responsibility for listening and responding to the voices of young people. This might be a councillor/elected member or a senior officer. This meeting would give them the chance to reflect on how far they have travelled towards achieving the 'Good Practice Indicators' under each of the 7 Key Questions. The local authorities are asked to assess themselves against each of these questions using the 'traffic lights' method as either:

- **Green:** in place and have evidence
- **Amber:** in place but needs some improvement
- **Red:** nothing in place (yet)

In the following chapters we will address each of the 7 Key Questions separately. This will include an overview of the indicators of best practice which have been designed by the BYC, followed by a breakdown and analysis of the results of the self-assessments.

Question 1: Is the Youth Voice Vehicle Representative of the Youth Population in the Authority?

Indicators of Best Practice	Green	Amber	Red	Total Responses	Percentage of LA's that have something in place (Green + Amber)
Young people are elected to the YVV through a transparent recruitment and election process with a turnout of more than 25% of the relevant youth population	48.24% (41)	38.82% (33)	12.94% (11)	85	87.06%
The YVV regularly reviews its membership and has a transparent strategy to ensure that the YVV represents the diversity of the youth population of the area (this could include reserved places for under-represented groups, outreach campaign to ensure people from under-represented groups stand for election etc)	59.77% (52)	39.08% (34)	1.15% (1)	87	98.85%
The YVV is linked to single issue and special interest young people's voice groups in the area (e.g. Young People in Care Forum, Environment Groups) with clear mechanisms for representing the interests of these groups	58.62% (51)	36.78% (32)	4.6% (4)	87	95.4%
Schools, colleges and academies in the local authority area recognise the YVV as a powerful voice for young people and support its elections and campaigns	41.38% (36)	52.87% (46)	5.75% (5)	87	94.25%
YVV meetings are accessible to young people with particular needs, whether physical, cultural or emotional.	83.91% (73)	14.94% (13)	1.15% (1)	87	98.85%
The YVV has a transparent strategy to ensure that it provides appropriate access for all its members, including transport, access to ICT, care requirements etc	58.62% (51)	39.08% (34)	2.3% (2)	87	97.7%

The table above shows the Indicators of Best Practice that the Local Authorities (LA's) have used to measure themselves against question one. Next to these are the figures showing how the LA's have assessed themselves using the 'Traffic Lights' system outlined in the previous chapter. The total number of authorities that responded in each way is shown in brackets whilst the percentage figures give an overall impression of how well each Key Indicator is being met – this will be the layout across all of the following chapters.

In order for any YVV to hold credible sway as a representative body it must be truly reflective of the youth population of the local authority's area. In order to achieve this there are a number of steps that must be taken, these include; a transparent election/recruitment process with a substantial voter turnout, ensuring that the YVV represents the full diversity of the local youth population, that any barriers to access posed by young people's particular needs are overcome and that academic institutions in the area support both its elections and campaigns.

The above data demonstrates that the vast majority of authorities have mechanisms in place to try and ensure that their YVVs are representative. This is true of all of the key indicators with a slight exception for the first. This is likely to be reflective of the indicator requiring a 25% turnout in their elections, something that we know that a number of local authorities haven't achieved.²

The results present a positive image of the representativeness of YVVs but it is particularly positive to see how well the majority of authorities are performing in terms of ensuring that YVV meetings are accessible to all young people and especially those with additional needs. Around 84% of authorities categorize themselves as achieving the Green standard whilst only one authority doesn't feel it has anything in place to facilitate this.

² Election Monitoring Report, BYC (2013)

Question 2: Is the YVV accountable to the youth population in the authority?

Indicators of Best Practice	Green	Amber	Red	Total Responses	Percentage of LA's that have something in place (Green + Amber)
The YVV produces an annual manifesto/work plan, endorsed by supporters/ members	51.72% (45)	39.08% (34)	9.2% (8)	87	90.8%
The YVV regularly consults with young people on priorities and significant issues	68.97% (60)	29.88% (26)	1.15% (1)	87	98.85%
The YVV regularly liaises with other youth forums (e.g. district forums, special interest groups)	55.17% (48)	41.38% (36)	3.45% (3)	87	96.55%
The YVV has a clear Communications Strategy (which includes regular publication of priorities and achievements, web-site regularly updated with interactive consultation opportunities, creative and appropriate use of new social media to promote the activities of the YVV, mailing list of supporters/member organisations who are regularly asked for their views, engaging with schools, colleges and academies, annual report on activities, agreed protocols for media engagement by YVV, targets for positive media mentions for YVV activities)	32.18% (28)	57.47% (50)	10.35% (9)	87	89.65%

When we talk about accountability what we are really examining is how answerable the YVV's are to the local youth population. The ways to ensure that they are accountable is to have them produce a manifesto on which the youth population has had their say, to regularly consult with young people regarding key issues and priorities, to liaise with other youth groups and to regularly publish their priorities and achievements. This then allows the LA's youth population to see what the YVV's goals are and to see how effectively they are achieving them. Regular consultation with them then gives them the opportunity to raise any concerns, or indeed support, with them.

The data again paints a very clear picture that the majority of local authorities (around 94%) have systems in place to try and ensure that their YVV is accountable to the youth population.

The one area that does stand out, however, is the communication strategy of the YVV's. This key indicator lists a number of examples of what a good communication strategy would consist of, including; having their 'website regularly updated with interactive consultation opportunities' and 'targets for positive media mentions for YVV activities'. The majority of local authorities who responded did have something in place to try and meet these requirements but the impression given by the large number of respondents who categorized themselves as Amber is that they have systems in place to fulfill some of these aims but not all of them yet. It also shows that they appreciate that to make their strategy more effective they could introduce the remaining ones as they placed themselves in the "room for improvement" category.

One of the most effectual ways on ensuring that YVV's are accountable to the youth population is to facilitate regular consultations between them. This is the key indicator against which authorities felt that they were performing particularly well. It is through this type of regular interaction that young people are able to have their voices and opinions heard and acted on. They are able influence the YVV's general priorities and individual issue focus as well as having the YVV's feedback about their work.

Question 3: How Independent is the YVV?

Indicators of Best Practice	Green	Amber	Red	Total Responses	Percentage of LA's that have something in place (Green + Amber)
The YVV has terms of reference or a constitution which state that it is an independent body with young people as elected officers. Its constitution enables it to campaign on issues that may not be priorities for the local authority	54.02% (47)	34.48% (30)	11.5% (10)	87	88.5%
The YVV has its own bank account and is responsible for managing its budget. It generates income to support its campaigns from a number of sources	18.39% (16)	32.18% (28)	49.43% (43)	87	50.57%
The YVV's Communications Strategy enables it to manage its own media relations, independent of the local authority	16.28% (14)	44.19% (38)	39.53% (34)	86	60.47%

The reason that independence is of such importance is that the most effective YVVs are independent ones. This is an area where there may be disputes and tensions with local authorities so it is very important to have discussions on the level of independence of the YVV. There are certain key indicators that have been included that may not be as self explanatory as others. For example, the reason to arrange for a bank account for YVVS is that it gives young people the opportunity to raise money through applying for grants and taking part in fundraising activities. The YVV can then spend the money on what it thinks is important.

When looking through the results as a whole it becomes very quickly apparent that it is this area of independence that has the largest scope for improvement. This is particularly highlighted by the fact that the question contains the only key indicator across all seven questions that has the largest percentage of authorities fall into the Red category. Nearly half of those authorities who responded acknowledged that their YVV doesn't have its own bank account and associated responsibilities. Alongside this there are also a large percentage of authorities who don't facilitate their YVVs to manage their own media relations. This could be linked to the similar results on their YVV's "Communications Strategy". There is also anecdotal evidence that suggests that some authorities are nervous about allowing young people in their YVVs to have the freedom to communicate publically.

There is some positive news from this question, though, with the large majority of authorities feeling they had a system in place to allow their YVV to campaign independently of the local authority on issues that may not otherwise be a priority for the authority. This is obviously somewhat negated by the results in the following indicators that look at the specifics of what a YVV would need to be able to campaign independently.

Question 4: Does the YVV receive sufficient support from the local authority to enable it to fulfill its role?

Indicators of Best Practice	Green	Amber	Red	Total Responses	Percentage of LA's that have something in place (Green + Amber)
The YVV determines the support it needs in order to effectively represent the voice of young people, and has negotiated a support package with the local authority	66.67% (56)	33.33% (28)	0.00% (0)	84	100%
The local authority demonstrates its commitment to hearing the voice of young people	66.27% (55)	32.52% (27)	1.21% (1)	83	98.79%

Support can mean a number of different things and should not always be seen as money. It could be that the local authority is happy to offer meeting space and office accommodation for the YVV. This is in-kind support and can cover lots of other things such as phones, access to email and equipment.

Often the support young people in the YVV find most useful is that of experienced and skilled youth workers. Youth workers can support the development of the YVV, run elections, act on decisions made by young people, make sure young people have information and are aware of opportunities available to them. As well as supporting the YVV organisation Youth workers can give support to individuals, depending on their needs, to help them play a full part in the YVV. A youth worker can deliver the training young people may need to understand how to be a good representative and make the YVV work.

The local authority may offer the expert help of other council officers to help young people make decisions. Often local authorities have good relationship with other organisations that run services that are used by young people such as the National Health Service or the Police. The local authority can support the YVV to make their own relationship with these organisations.

With all of this in mind it is very positive to see that there is only a single authority, for a single indicator, that recorded that they have nothing in place. This is obviously a concern for that area as local authorities should be demonstrating their commitment to hearing the voice of young people but the overall picture is extremely positive. We would also argue that the reasonably large number of authorities who class themselves as Amber is not a

concern either. This, instead, shows a commitment to genuine development and the realization that there is room for improvement in their current set up. Acknowledging that there is room for improvement is a vital first step in improving their service so this should be seen as a positive as long as there is continued movement from Amber to Green over the coming years.

Question 5: How much political and senior-level buy-in from the local authority is in place?

Indicators of Best Practice	Green	Amber	Red	Total Responses	Percentage of LA's that have something in place (Green + Amber)
The local authority has an overall strategy for listening to the views of children and young people, which goes beyond the Directorate for C&YP Services, recognising young people as having a voice in wider community matters.	65.52% (57)	31.03% (27)	3.45% (3)	87	96.55%
The local authority identifies a 'Youth Voice Champion' at elected member level to meet regularly with the YVV and be a first point of contact for YVV strategic concerns	51.72% (45)	27.59% (24)	20.69% (18)	87	79.31%
The local authority invites the YVV to 'youth-proof' policy changes to assess their impact on young people	40.23% (35)	42.53% (37)	17.24% (15)	87	82.76%
The local authority commissions a package of support (in kind and financial) with the YVV to provide effective representation of young people's voice	72.41% (63)	21.14% (21)	3.45% (3)	87	96.55%
The local authority encourages dialogue with young people through the YVV, going beyond its statutory duties to consult.	61.63% (53)	36.05% (31)	2.32% (2)	86	97.68%

The Government has signed up to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and through Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities on Services and Activities to Improve Young People's Wellbeing and Positive for Youth sets out certain things for local authorities to do to make sure they listen to young people and involve them in decision making.

Local authorities can demonstrate their support for young peoples' voice by having a strategy for listening to the views young people. Some local authorities have an elected member or senior officer who acts as a Young People's Champion and is the link between the YVV and the elected members. Having a champion at the heart of decision making can make a big difference to how much young people are listened to and to how much power and influence they have.

When policies are written or changed a local authority may ask young people to 'youth-proof' it. 'Youth-proofing' involves young people in having a say in how policies developed by local authorities and other organisations affect them. It helps make sure that the needs of young people are considered alongside those of other members of the community.

Political and senior level buy-in is vital if the YVV's are going to have a real and sustained impact on their local area and as such it is again very encouraging to find that over 90% of authorities have at least some mechanism in place to meet the overall aims of the indicators. There are some areas that fair better than others, for example local authorities perform particularly well in encouraging dialogue with young people beyond what they are statutorily expected to do. This doesn't, however, seem to extend to the same extent to inviting young people to "youth proof" policy changes. There are still a large majority who have something in place to try and facilitate this but there is evidentially room for improvement. It is very positive to have that ongoing dialogue between authorities and young people as long as this relationship continues to grow and develop to a point where the young people's views are having a direct impact on things such as policy development.

Question 6: How much power and influence does the YVV have?

Indicators of Best Practice	Green	Amber	Red	Total Responses	Percentage of LA's that have something in place (Green + Amber)
The YVV and/or associated young people's organisations have a clearly articulated role as a partner in all aspects of commissioning services for young people, Grant aid decisions for youth facilities, Scrutiny/review of council services, 'Youth-proofing' new policies, Shadowing Cabinet members and senior council officials	24.14% (21)	64.37% (56)	11.49% (10)	87	88.51%
The local authority involves the YVV as a partner in multi-agency local strategies that affect young people (e.g. transport strategies)	25.29% (22)	58.62% (51)	16.09% (14)	87	83.91%
There is a clear decision making process, in which recommendations from the YVV are given serious consideration, and where they cannot be implemented, the local authority provides a written explanation of the reasons for the decisions made.	27.59% (24)	57.47% (50)	14.94% (13)	87	85.06%
The YVV has a representative role with statutory bodies beyond the local authority, including police and health authorities	35.63% (31)	50.57% (44)	13.80% (12)	87	86.20%

The words 'power' and 'influence' are often used together but they are subtly different and in this context influence means that young people have the capacity to have an effect on the development, or behaviour of someone or something as opposed to having the direct power to make a decision on something. For example the YVV may have the power and ability to make formal decisions on certain issues such as grant giving. Conversely they may not have direct decision making responsibilities for other areas, such as youth transport policies, but they may be able to exert significant influence on those that do make these decisions

The defined role of a YVV could include grant aid decisions, scrutinising council policy, being involved in commissioning. This should be an agreed role and could be part the constitution

or terms of reference of the YVV so that it is transparent and is clear about the right of a YVV to make independent decisions. In terms of a having a clearly defined role and being included as a partner in all aspects of commissioning services for young people there is plenty of room for improvement. At present, only 24% of LA's feel this is an area that they are performing particularly well in with 64% feeling there is room for improvement and the remaining having nothing in place to facilitate this at all.

It is also important that young people are given feedback on the results of decisions that they have contributed to so they understand the rationale. Young people often complain of the 'consultation black hole' where they give information and views and then never hear anything back. This is an area that appears to still be in need of some improvement. Around 62% of LA's admit that they either have nothing in place to guarantee this or that what they have in place is in need of improvement.

Although there does appear to be plenty of room for improvement in terms of the YVV's power and influence it is a positive sign that around 86% of LA's have at least some system in place to ensure that the YVV's can exercise suitable power and influence. Their willingness to acknowledge that there is room for improvement demonstrates their commitment to working towards a system where their YVV's exert sufficient power and influence.

Question 7: What impact does the YVV have on policies and services for young people?

Best Practice Indicators	Green	Amber	Red	Total Responses	Percentage of LA's that have something in place (Green + Amber)
The YVV and local authority conduct regular surveys of young people and periodic evaluations to assess the impact of YVV involvement	37.93% (33)	43.68% (38)	18.39% (16)	87	81.61%
The local authority is able to identify differences that have been made as a result of YVV involvement	53.49% (46)	43.02% (37)	3.49% (3)	86	96.51%
More positive coverage of young people's concerns in the local media	44.19% (38)	41.86% (36)	13.95% (12)	86	86.05%
Future plans for the YVV build on the feedback received about their impact on young people's lives	48.28% (42)	41.38% (36)	10.34% (9)	87	89.66%

Closely linked to the idea of power and influence, and in fact a good indicator of those attributes, is what impact YVV's have on policies and services. Impact means the effect and or influence that an activity or process has had on young people. Young people will want to know how strong and significant their impact has been, funders will certainly want to know and so will the local authorities or organisations the YVV has worked with.

We can again see from this data that the overwhelming majority of LA's (around 88%) have some sort of strategy and systems in place to try and ensure that their YVV's have an impact of policies and services. Although a cursory glance may give the impression that there are a lot of areas in need of improvement it is actually a pretty equal split between those that have room for improvement and those that are already working at a high standard.

The data also shows that, of all of the outcomes, the highest number of LA's felt they were performing at the highest level in terms of identifying differences that have been made as a result of YVV involvement. Not only is this positive in terms of the reporting strategy but at a much more important level it demonstrates that YVV's are having a direct impact.

Year on Year Comparison

As has been noted previously in this report there has been a change in the overall data sets for the impact assessment reporting between the 2012 report and this one. There has been an increase in the total number of local authorities who took part in the reporting plus some local authorities who only took part in the process for one of the two years. As such, comparisons between the two years have been made sparingly and in very general terms. What the following sections does, however, is to pull out the results from those local authorities who have provided results for both years. What this does is facilitate a direct, and accurate, comparison between the impact of YVV's between 2012 and 2013. In total there are 48 local authorities included in the following data and comparison, a list of which can be found in appendix 5.

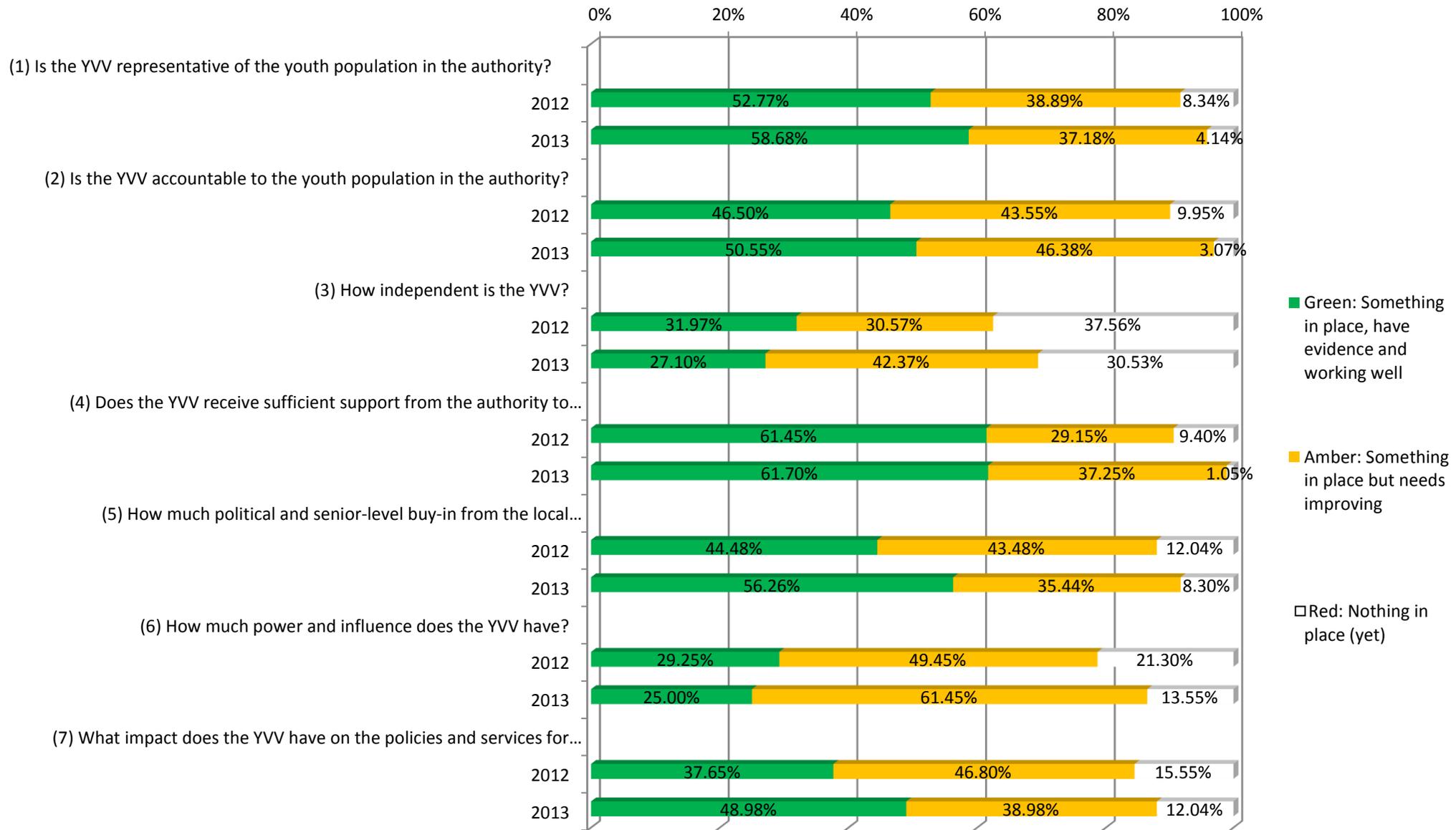
The table below shows a quick snapshot of the overall results for the 7 questions compared year on year. The first thing that becomes apparent is that there has been at least some improvement recorded for all of the areas measured.

	2012 Percentage of LA's that have something in place (Green + Amber)	2013 Percentage of LA's that have something in place (Green + Amber)
(1) Is the YVV representative of the youth population in the authority?	91.66%	95.86%
(2) Is the YVV accountable to the youth population in the authority?	90.05%	96.93%
(3) How independent is the YVV?	62.54%	69.47%
(4) Does the YVV receive sufficient support from the authority to enable it to fulfil its role?	90.60%	98.95%
(5) How much political and senior-level buy-in from the local authority is in place?	87.96%	91.70%
(6) How much power and influence does the YVV have?	78.70%	86.45%
(7) What impact does the YVV have on the policies and services for young people?	84.45%	87.96%

This is a trend which is obviously very positive and an overall increase in authorities having some sort of mechanism in place to meet these criteria is the general pattern we would hope to see. In more specific terms, though, we would really want to see that those that were previously in the Red category moving to Amber and those in Amber progressing to Green. It is this trend specifically that warrants closer attention. The graph below breaks the above figures down further, examining what percentage of the respondents have categorised themselves – as opposed to the above which groups Amber and Red together.

Below is a look in more detail at each of the questions to see where the improvements have been made. This will be looking at the key indicators for each questions which have been discussed in the previous section of this report. It will not, as before, look at each indicator but will instead focus on those that have seen a significant change between the two years. Any indicator which is not mentioned in this section, but was listed in the previous results, has had little or no change.

**Graph Showing Comparison between 2012 and 2013
Self-Assessment Data**



Question 1: Is the Youth Voice Vehicle Representative of the Youth Population in the Authority?

This is an area where those authorities who responded were performing well last year but it has still seen an increase in the overall number of LAs that now have something in place to ensure their YVV is representative. There has been a slight decrease in those authorities who categorise themselves as Amber but this has been more than accounted for by those who now identify themselves as Green. Each of the 6 indicators noted previously for this question have seen an increase in the number of authorities who place themselves in the Green category but it is the second of these that has seen the most significant increase:

“The YVV regularly reviews its membership and has a transparent strategy to ensure that the YVV represents the diversity of the youth population of the area”

This has seen an almost 15% movement from the Amber category to the Green Category whilst those in the Red have stayed reasonably consistent. This improvement now sees over 60% of local authorities reporting that they are performing very well at ensuring that their YVV represents the diversity of the youth population of the area.

Question 2: Is the YVV accountable to the youth population in the authority?

The question of accountability has seen the sort of formulaic movement that we would hope/expect to see in the results. The number of authorities who have nothing in place has decreased and at the same time those who categorise themselves as either Amber or Green have both increased. One of the first things to note is that every authority who responded now reports that it *“regularly consults with young people on priorities and significant issues”*.

The second thing that becomes very quickly apparent is the increase in authorities who now feel they are ensuring that their YVV regularly liaises with other youth forums (such as special interest groups). There has been around a 15% increase in authorities who now place themselves in the Green category for this key indicator.

As a slight caveat to the above it is worth noting that there is one of the key indicators that has seen an increase in the number of authorities whose *“YVV produces an annual manifesto/work plan, endorsed by supporters/ members”*. There has been about a 4% increase in this category which now sees just over 10% with nothing in place for to facilitate, or attempt, this. There are possible reasons for this such as the two year cycle that some

authorities use for their YVV (especially their UKYP terms of office) and as such may be doing this bi-annually instead.

Question 3: How Independent is the YVV?

The independence of the YVV shows a slightly different pattern than those above, specifically the decrease in those categorised as Green for the key indicators. Again, there is a general positive comparison with last year as there has been an overall increase in those authorities who are at least doing something to try and ensure the independence of their YVV. There has again been a decrease across all of the indicators for authorities who are doing nothing (Red) and a significant one in places; *“The YVV has terms of reference or a constitution which state that it is an independent body with young people as elected officers. Its constitution enables it to campaign on issues that may not be priorities for the local authority”* has seen a 50% reduction in those categorised as Red.

What is different about this specific indicator, however, is that there hasn't been an increase in those who categorise themselves as Green and instead there has been a movement from both Red to Amber and Green to Amber. The results show a 20% increase in those that now feel they have something in place but that there is room for improvement. This is accounted for by an equal movement of 10% each from the Red and Green categories. It may be possible to argue that a movement from Green to Amber could be accounted for by a more realistic assessment of their YVV but without more research into those authorities who have moved categories this is merely speculation.

Question 4: Does the YVV receive sufficient support from the local authority to enable it to fulfill its role?

The overall movement seen in the summary graph above is representative of the movement evident for each of the specific key indicators used in this question. There are only two and both have seen almost no movement in the percentage of authorities who categorise themselves as Green. At the same time the decrease in the Red categories is directly accounted for by the increase in the percentage of authorities who now put themselves in the Amber categories.

Question 5: How much political and senior-level buy-in from the local authority is in place?

It is the amount of political and senior-level buy-in that has seen the most significant increase in authorities performing to the top category. There has been significant increase in this for all of the indicators but most significantly of all there was around a 20% increase in those in the Green category for the following two indicators:

“The local authority invites the YVV to ‘youth-proof’ policy changes to assess their impact on young people”

“The local authority commissions a package of support (in kind and financial) with the YVV to provide effective representation of young people’s voice”

This has not been a move that was significantly reflected in authorities who have moved out of the red category. The implication being that it is much harder for those authorities who don’t have this type of buy-in to implement some than it is to increase buy-in that already takes place to some degree. It is also significant to note that this increase is reflected in the final question about the impact that YVVs are having. This is not an unexpected correlation as a greater level of buy in from those at a senior level is likely to facilitate an increase in the impact that those YVVs can and do have.

Question 6: How much power and influence does the YVV have?

The amount of power and influence that the YVVs have follows a similar pattern to question Three with almost all key indicators showing a decrease in both Red and Green categorised authorities. This movement is then accounted for by a significant increase in those authorities who feel they are attempting to meet the indicators but that there is room for improvement. As has been noted previously, we would not see being in this category as a generally negative thing. It shows that the local authority is trying to make its YVV as effective as possible and recognises that more can be done to improve it. There was also more movement from Red to Amber than from Green to Amber and for one indicator there was, in fact, an increase in Green responses:

“The YVV has a representative role with statutory bodies beyond the local authority, including police and health authorities”

All of the indicators showed movement along the lines outlined about but there was one that showed a particularly significant change:

“There is a clear decision making process, in which recommendations from the YVV are given serious consideration, and where they cannot be implemented, the local authority provides a written explanation of the reasons for the decisions made”

There was an almost 30% increase in authorities who felt they were doing this but that there was room for improvement (Amber). This was reflected by a 20% decrease in those in the Red category and a 10% decrease in the Green category.

Question 7: What impact does the YVV have on policies and services for young people?

This is the final question and the one that is arguably the most important of them. The other questions would feed into this one and an increase in performance against the previous indicators should lead to an increase in the impact that the YVV has. What the results for this show is that there is an almost uniform movement across all of the indicators with the percentage of authorities in Red and Amber categories reducing whilst the number of those categorised as Green significantly improved. The only exception to this was *“More positive coverage of young people’s concerns in the local media”* which saw an increase in the number of authorities who felt that they had nothing in place to facilitate this. Alongside this there was an increase in authorities who felt they were now performing up to the Green standard but this was less significant than the move into the Red.

As previously mentioned there would appear to be a clear correlation between the increase in buy-in and the increase in impact but this link is probably wider than this. It is likely that the increase across the board which sees an increase in the number of authorities who have at least something in place to meet the key indicators has led to an increase in the impact that their YVV is able to have.

Year on Year - “Snapshot” Survey Comparison

Below are the results of the Snapshot survey that was carried out as a supplement to the Self Assessment toolkit research that has been utilized above. As with the “Year on Year” section above the below table shows the results of those authorities that completed the survey for both years to allow for a direct comparison. The total results for this year’s survey can be found in appendix 5. There were a total of 83 responses in 2013 but as can be seen below there were 63 authorities who completed the survey for both years and are therefore used in the results below.

Method used	Percentage of English LAs utilising this method in 2012	Percentage of English LAs currently utilising this method
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LA-wide initiatives:	2012	2013
Youth Council/Forum/Cabinet (LA-wide)	92.1% (58)	92.1% (58)
UK Youth Parliament	93.7% (59)	95.2% (60)
Young Mayor	20.6% (13)	22.2% (14)

Legislatively required initiatives:		
Children in Care Council	96.8% (61)	92.1% (58)

Specialist initiatives:		
LGBTQ Forums	15.9% (10)	49.2% (31)
Healthwatch	14.3% (9)	61.9% (39)
Health Forum	14.3% (9)	36.5% (23)
Anti Bullying group	3.2% (2)	33.3% (21)
LA-wide school pupil forum	23.8% (15)	30.2% (19)
BME Forum	7.9% (5)	22.2% (14)
Youthbank/YOF	4.8% (3)	30.2% (19)
Scrutiny panels	12.7% (8)	42.8% (27)
Young disabled forum	55.6% (35)	60.3% (38)
Young Asylums/Refugees Forum	4.8% (3)	9.5% (6)
Young Carers Forums	20.6% (13)	68.3% (43)
Housing/Tenants Forums	12.7% (8)	36.5% (23)
CAHMHS/Mental Health group	6.3% (4)	42.9% (27)
Commissioning	17.5% (11)	58.7% (37)
Youth club forums	15.9% (10)	71.4% (45)
Young Inspectors	22.2% (14)	61.9% (39)
Child Trust Boards	17.5% (11)	55.5% (35)
Police Youth Forum	7.9% (5)	33.3% (21)

Total number of responses	63	63
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The first thing that becomes apparent when you compare the results from the two years is the dramatic increase that the “Specialist Initiatives” have seen. The utilisation of UK Youth Parliament, Youth Councils and Young Mayors has remained almost unchanged but the

results show that there have been a lot of new YVV mechanisms introduced over the last 12 months. There has been an increase of a third in the use of LGBTU forums, for example, and a 48% increase in the use of Young Carers Forums. There are plenty of other examples of large increases which can be seen in the table above but it is also worth noting that there has been an increase in the use of all of the above mentioned mechanisms. The only notable exception to this is Children in Care Councils, something which is particularly surprising considering the statutory obligation to provide this.

Additional Snapshot Questions for 2013

In addition to those questions that were mentioned above, there were two new questions added to the 2013 Snapshot survey. These were in relation to the '*Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities on Services and Activities to Improve Young People's Well-being*'. It asked Local Authorities that, bearing this guidance in mind had they:

- 1) Taken steps to ascertain the views of young people and to take them into account in making decisions about services and activities for them.**

An overwhelming majority (91.6%) said that they had. Those that remained indicated that they weren't sure. (The three options being "yes", "no" or "not sure")

- 2) Enabled young people to inspect and report at least annually on the quality and accessibility of provision**

The response to this was less positive than the first of these questions with only 60% indicating that they had enabled this process to happen. The remaining 40% were split evenly over the remaining two answers with around 20% saying that they hadn't and 20% saying they weren't sure.

An initial look at these results does give a very positive image of both youth participation and youth influence across local authorities. We wouldn't want to take away from this but we would, however, posit some caution as anecdotal evidence suggests that the impact young people are having on decisions in their local area is not as prolific as these results would suggest. It may be that in future years further questioning is needed to draw out how the views of young people are being taken into account to ensure a true reflection on this issue by local authorities.

Appendix

Appendix 1

There were no Local Authorities who felt they were performing at the highest level across all key indicators for all of the 7 questions. There were, however, some Local Authorities that scored all green across the key indicators for a single topic. Noted below are some examples of authorities that self identified as all green for the 7 key areas that were assessed:

- **Representative** **East Sussex**
- **Accountability** **Doncaster**
- **Independence** **Sheffield**
- **Support** **York**
- **Political and senior buy in** **Hillingdon**
- **Power and influence** **Bedford Borough Council**
- **Impact** **Portsmouth**

Appendix 2

Below is a list of all of the Local Authorities that took part in the self assessment (2013):

- Barking & Dagenham
- Barnet
- Barnsley
- Bedford Bro Council
- Blackburn with Darwen
- Bolton
- Brent
- Buckinghamshire
- Calderdale
- Camden
- Central Bedfordshire
- Cheshire West
- Cornwall
- Coventry
- Croydon
- Cumbria
- Darlington
- Derbyshire
- Doncaster
- Dudley
- Ealing
- East Sussex
- Enfield
- Gloucestershire
- Greenwich
- Halton
- Hammersmith/Fulham
- Hampshire
- Harrow
- Hartlepool
- Havering
- Hertfordshire
- Hillingdon
- Hounslow
- Isle Of Wight
- Islington
- Kensington/Chelsea
- Kent
- Kingston upon Thames
- Lancashire
- Leeds
- Lincolnshire
- Liverpool
- Luton
- Manchester
- Middlesbrough
- Milton Keynes
- Newcastle upon Tyne
- North East Lincolnshire
- North Yorkshire
- Nottinghamshire (Notts CC)
- Oldham
- Oxfordshire
- Peterborough
- Poole -
- Portsmouth
- Reading
- Redbridge
- Richmond U Thames
- Rochdale
- Salford
- Sandwell
- Sefton
- Sheffield
- Solihull
- Somerset
- South Tyneside
- Southend-on-Sea
- Southwark
- Staffordshire
- Stockport
- Suffolk
- Sutton
- Swindon
- Thurrock
- Torbay
- Tower Hamlets
- Trafford
- Wandsworth
- Warwickshire
- West Sussex
- Wigan
- Worcestershire
- York

Appendix 3

Below is a list of all of the Local Authorities that took part in the self assessment over both years (used for the “Year on Year Comparison”):

- Barking & Dagenham
- Barnet
- Bedford Bro Council
- Buckinghamshire
- Calderdale
- Central Bedfordshire
- Cornwall
- Croydon
- Darlington
- Doncaster
- Ealing
- East Sussex
- Gloucestershire
- Hammersmith/Fulham
- Hampshire
- Hartlepool
- Havering
- Hertfordshire
- Hillingdon
- Islington
- Kent
- Kingston upon Thames
- Lancashire
- Leeds
- Lincolnshire
- Luton
- Manchester
- Middlesbrough
- Milton Keynes
- Newcastle upon Tyne
- North East Lincolnshire
- Oldham
- Poole -
- Portsmouth
- Reading
- Sandwell
- Somerset
- Southwark
- Staffordshire
- Sutton
- Swindon
- Thurrock
- Torbay
- Tower Hamlets
- Trafford
- Wandsworth
- Wigan
- York

Below is a list of all of the Local Authorities that took part in the Snapshot Survey over both years:

- Barking & Dagenham
- Barnet
- Barnsley
- Bedford Bro Council
- Bolton
- Brighton & Hove
- Bristol, City of
- Calderdale
- Croydon
- Darlington
- Derbyshire
- Dorset
- Ealing
- Greenwich
- Hammersmith/Fulham
- Hampshire
- Hartlepool
- Hertfordshire
- Hillingdon
- Isles of Scilly
- Islington
- Kent
- Kingston Upon Hull, City of
- Lancashire
- Leeds
- Leicester City
- Leicestershire
- Middlesbrough
- Norfolk
- North Yorkshire
- Nottinghamshire (Notts CC)
- Oldham
- Oxfordshire
- Peterborough
- Poole -
- Portsmouth
- Reading
- Redbridge
- Rochdale
- Rutland
- Salford
- Shropshire
- Solihull
- Somerset
- Southend-on-Sea
- Staffordshire
- Suffolk
- Sutton
- Swindon
- Telford and Wrekin
- Thurrock
- Torbay
- Tower Hamlets
- Trafford
- Wakefield
- Walsall
- Wandsworth
- Warrington
- Warwickshire
- Wigan
- Wolverhampton
- Worcestershire
- York

Appendix 5

The results of the Snapshot Survey 2013:

Method used	Percentage of English LAs currently utilising this method
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LA-wide initiatives:	
Youth Council/Forum/Cabinet (LA-wide)	91.6% (76)
UK Youth Parliament	96.4% (80)
Young Mayor	20.5% (17)
Total LAs that have at least one of these in place:	98.8% (82)

Legislatively required initiatives:	
Children in Care Council	92.8% (77)

Specialist initiatives:	
LGBTQ Forums	46.9% (39)
Healthwatch	63.8% (53)
Health Forum	34.9% (29)
Anti Bullying group	36.1% (30)
LA-wide school pupil forum	28.9% (24)
BME Forum	25.3% (21)
Youthbank/YOF	27.7% (23)
Scrutiny panels	45.7% (38)
Young disabled forum	57.8% (48)
Young Asylums/Refugees Forum	10.8% (9)
Young Carers Forums	72.2% (60)
Housing/Tenants Forums	40.9% (34)
CAHMHS/Mental Health group	45.7% (38)
Commissioning	57.8% (48)
Youth club forums	71.0% (58)
Young Inspectors	62.6% (52)
Child Trust Boards	56.6% (47)
Police Youth Forum	32.5% (27)
Total LAs that have at least one specialist initiative in place:	100% (83)

Total number of responses	83
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(Survey Carried out July 2013)

Appendix 6

Below is a list of all of the Local Authorities that took part in the Snapshot Survey in 2013:

- Barking & Dagenham
- Barnet
- Barnsley
- Bedford Bro Council
- Bolton
- Brent
- Brighton & Hove
- Bristol, City of
- Calderdale
- Camden
- Central Bedfordshire
- Croydon
- Darlington
- Derbyshire
- Devon
- Dorset
- Dudley
- Ealing
- East Sussex
- Enfield
- Gateshead
- Gloucestershire
- Greenwich
- Halton
- Hammersmith/Fulham
- Hampshire
- Harrow
- Hartlepool
- Hertfordshire
- Hillingdon
- Hounslow
- Isles of Scilly
- Islington
- Kensington/Chelsea
- Kent
- Kingston Upon Hull, City of
- Lancashire
- Leeds
- Leicester City
- Leicestershire
- Liverpool
- Luton
- Middlesbrough
- Milton Keynes
- Norfolk
- North Yorkshire
- Nottinghamshire (Notts CC)
- Oldham
- Peterborough
- Poole -
- Portsmouth
- Reading
- Redbridge
- Rochdale
- Rutland
- Salford
- Sheffield
- Shropshire
- Solihull
- Somerset
- South Tyneside
- Southend-on-Sea
- Southwark
- Staffordshire
- Suffolk
- Sunderland
- Sutton
- Swindon
- Telford and Wrekin
- Thurrock
- Torbay
- Tower Hamlets
- Trafford
- Wakefield
- Walsall
- Wandsworth
- Warrington
- Warwickshire
- Wigan
- Wolverhampton
- Worcestershire
- York

