

Scrutiny Committee Meeting 12th February 2024

The following is a brief feedback report of the activities from Blackburn with Darwen Youth Forum for the period November 2023 to January 2024.

In November 2023 young people from the youth forum went on a residential trip to London, where we had the unique opportunity to visit the House of Commons for the MYPs event. The Youth MPs engaged in insightful discussions and gained first-hand experience in parliamentary proceedings discussing the issues around the Cost-of-Living Crisis.

Throughout the day Youth MPs had the opportunity to debate on 5 topics. These were, holiday hunger, quality of food, standardisation, finance and funding and additional pricing. Following the debates on the 5 topics, Youth MPs were given the opportunity to vote on their top priority, which would then be actioned and worked on by the Youth parliament in the coming year.

The top vote in the House of Commons Youth parliament event was 'finance and funding'. Youth MPs throughout the country will focus and work on this topic for the coming year. Finance and funding will focus on discussing and strategizing how free school meals could be financed, and how funds will be raised to support the aim of each school aged young person having access to healthy and nutritious meals in schools.

Additionally, our itinerary included visits to the Supreme Court, offering valuable insights into the judicial system. Beyond the educational aspects, the group explored the rich history of London through guided tours, immersing ourselves in the cultural and architectural marvels of the city. A highlight of the trip was a cruise along the historic River Thames and a visit to the Greenwich observatory. The experiences gained from this trip not only broadened the YP's perspectives but also fostered personal and professional development.

We have recently met between our YP and Councillor Damian Talbot along with Martin Eden regarding the potential reduction in pricing for student memberships to access the BwD Leisure Centre.

The meeting was both productive and collaborative, with our YP presenting a compelling case for the importance of affordable fitness options for students in our community. Councillor Talbot and Mr. Eden expressed a genuine interest in supporting the well-being of our younger demographic and are open to exploring viable solutions. We are currently working together to assess the financial feasibility of reducing the membership costs while ensuring the continued sustainability of the Leisure Centre.

Further discussions will take place to finalise the details of this initiative, and we are optimistic about the positive impact it could have on both our students and the community at large. I will continue to keep the executive board informed as we progress in these discussions, and we thank you Councillor Talbot and Martin Eden for attending and your positive support.

In addition, Francis Riley from the Boroughs' Public Health team also came to our Youth Forum to consult us on the draft, Mental Wellbeing, Mental Health, Self-Harm and Suicide Prevention Strategy. As well as the Youth Forum having their input into the development of the strategy, we have also advised the public health team to carry out further consultations with our new Young BwD Forum (formerly known as SYA). We feel this will further add to the strategy.

We also attended this month's Youthforia meeting which was based on a variety of workshops such as civic identity and contribution to the YoFo research project. We also voted on the new steering group candidates for the 2024 term.

In the SYA forum's successor the Young BwD Forum we discussed the future of the project and rebranding with logo's, we met with Hannah Dean from BwD Public Health to discuss the co-production of the child poverty strategy and had a presentation from a representative from the NSPCC, on all the different support mechanisms they can provide to young people.

Collaboration with Chiara Rinaldi's PhD Research:

The BwD Youth Forum actively engaged with Chiara Rinaldi, who is conducting a PhD research project on childhood obesity and the broader scope of how local authorities prioritise action on public health and food environments. This partnership continues to evolve, reflecting our commitment to contributing to meaningful research in these areas.

Youth Interviewing Skills Training

Our Youth Participation Staff conducted training sessions to enhance the interviewing skills of young people. This initiative not only empowers our young people but also prepares them for their future endeavours. Feedback has been that our panels are more intense than the adult panels!

Our work in recent weeks has mainly centred around preparing for the Youth election 2024. 9 young people have come forward to be candidates for the youth election, with a good mixture of both gender and backgrounds. Some of the issues they hope to and are campaigning on, range from mental health issues, good quality education for young people, job opportunities for young people in the Borough, to concerns around young people being involved in online gaming gambling.

Some of the candidates also attended a training Residential in January at Coldwell Inn near Nelson. The main theme for the Residential was training around democracy, and how this works in the UK, young people also looked at areas such as representation, looking at how budgets work and how to take forward the views of young people in important meetings.

Voting to elect the new Youth MP will take place, in the week beginning 26th February until 8th March, in schools, colleges, youth clubs and in places such as youth zone and other partner agencies. The result will be announced on Monday 11th March in the Town Hall. And hopefully there will be new Youth MPs at these meetings next time to represent the voice of young people in Blackburn with Darwen.

Corporate Parenting Strategy

Recently, we undertook a consultation around renewing the Borough's Corporate parenting strategy for Children in Our Care and Leaving care young people. Approximately 30 young people from these groups participated. Issues/areas covered included, what is a corporate parent, what are their priorities, and what they liked/disliked about the previous strategy. This piece of work will continue next week with more young people from these groups of young people and care experienced young people. The views and input from young people from this consultation will be included in the renewed Borough corporate parenting strategy.

Going forward we have several projects and voice activities planned which we will report back on in the next scrutiny committee meeting; however, our priority now is to carry out a successful youth election in the coming weeks.

In summary, our commitment to the well-being and development of young people in our community remains steadfast, as evidenced by our ongoing youth voice activities and research collaborations and continue develop plans for future participation and youth empowerment initiatives. We look forward to further discussions and guidance from the Executive Board as we continue to make a positive impact on the lives of young people in Blackburn with Darwen.

Blackburn with Darwen Youth Forum.