

North Wiltshire District Council Local Democracy Week

Background

The main event for 2006 was called 'Take Part Take Power' and was held at the District Council Offices on October 16th. This formed part of the nationally promoted Local Government Association's Local Democracy Week (16 – 20th October) which has the aim of engaging people in democracy and getting them involved in their own communities. This event was run jointly by NWDC and WCC's Youth Development Service who have been organising joint events for Local Democracy Week since 2004.

The aim of this event was to give young people a chance to think about key issues and to provide them with a chance to discuss ideas and learn lobbying and campaigning skills. Local politicians attended the event so that young people could ask questions and challenge them on what they and their party or council are doing during a question and answer session at the end.

Schools and Youth Development Centres across the district were invited to send young people and it was particularly aimed at young people who are on school councils or other representative bodies.

At the event there was a prize draw for two young people to win a trip to London to visit the Houses of Parliament at the end of Local Democracy Week.

Also during the week, District Councillors were also given the opportunity to talk to members of the young parents group who meet at the Bridge Youth Development Centre every Tuesday at lunch time. The aim of this session was to give the young parents a chance to meet their local councillors in an informal setting and for the councillors to find out more about the issues that are important to this particular group of young people.

The Events

'Take Part Take Power'

70 young people from across the district attended the event. The young people then had the opportunity to explore a range of issues using electronic hand held voting equipment. This meant they could give their opinions and see the results immediately in graph form on a large screen in the room. The issues that were looked at are as follows:

- Environment
- Perceptions of Young People
- Facilities
- Transport

These are all issues that have been established as being very important to young people.

At the end of this session young people voted for the one issue that they wanted to spend the rest of the event working on. Addressing negative perceptions of young people was the issue that was selected.

Young people rotated between two workshops to explore skills in how to work for change in their local communities. One workshop looked at how to run a successful campaign and the other focussed on how to get your message across; with particular emphasis on writing letters to the local MP and the local media 'live'.

After the workshops young people came back to the council chamber for a question and answer session with a panel of local politicians and decision-makers.

Young Parents Group Session

Councillor Chairman Peter Davis and Councillor Judy Rooke visited the Young Parents Group at the Bridge Youth Development Centre for some lunch and an informal chat with the young people on Oct 17th. Young parents (and the staff) had a chance to talk individually to the Councillors about any problems or issues and also to tell them about the group and what they do.

Outcomes and recommendations

The following is a list of ideas and recommendations that came from the young people during the workshops during. These are ways that they put forward to address the negative view of young people:

- **Active campaign within communities:** To include intergenerational meetings/projects; research to understand young people's issues; raise the profile of positive work of young people; encourage young people to get more involved in the community; create opportunities for different ages to mix; provide incentives for this work; fundraising; fun events for all ages.
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- **Facilities:** More facilities; give young people more things to do; promote the things that are going on more widely; provide more places to go in the evenings; under 18's disco; improve the facilities that we've got; consult young people about what they want.
- **An event/campaign to bring different groups of young people together to encourage tolerance:** youth arts and photography exhibition; team building activities for different groups of young people; a range of music event; a talent show - show people who you are and what you do; YPC to organise an event.
- **Media:** More positive articles about young people in the paper; collect evidence and present it to the media; a young people's newspaper; use Db8 mag/sparksite; a young people's page or regular feature in local paper to put across our viewpoints; use school magazines to raise awareness.

- **Campaigning:** A protest or march; signing petitions; write lots of letters (media/politicians); use the media; make a reality TV show about negative image of young people;

The question and answer session raised the some key points around the perceptions of young people and highlighted the fact that more work does need to be done on this area. This needs to be undertaken by politicians, the local councils and young people themselves. There was a general consensus that more facilities need to be provided for young people and that these facilities need to be well advertised and updated. Young people were very clear that they need to be involved in decisions around local facilities and that where they are consulted they want their opinions listened to acted on.

Results from the hand held voting session are attached (see appendix A)

Young Parents Group Session

During this session it was suggested that a parent and child area be set up in Emery Gate Shopping Centre in Chippenham. This could consist of a seating area with fixed toys and even small play equipment. A facility like this is provided in the Brunel Shopping Centre in Swindon and it was felt that Emery Gate would benefit from something similar.

Outcomes of the event:

Some of the campaign ideas will be picked up by North Wiltshire Young People's Council (YPC) and by Wiltshire Assembly of Youth (WAY). The YPC's main project is to challenge the negative perception of young people and they have been addressing this over the last 6 months through work with the police – this is on-going. After Local Democracy Week, they voted to expand this work to include addressing the negative media coverage of young people and securing a regular young people's section in a local paper.

Completed letters to local MP James Gray were delivered to his assistant by the young people who visited the Houses of Parliament at the end of the week and two letters were sent to the Gazette and Herald and published in the Nov 2nd edition (see attached). James Gray attended a meeting, in early November, with YPC members to discuss these points and other issues of concern to the YPC and young people in Wiltshire.