

Children and Young People's Plan – Direct Engagement Summary Report September 2022.

1) Overview

In developing the Children and Young People's Plan, we have designed and delivered 13 workshops across the Bi-Borough, engaging with over 130 children and young people aged 11- 25 including young people with SEND, Looked After Children and Care Leavers, Youth Council members, and young people engaged in youth clubs. We have also consulted with residents in both boroughs through the Citizen's Panel in Kensington and Chelsea, and the new Resident Research panel in Westminster. More information about the feedback from these consultations can be found at the end of this report.

We based our workshops with young people on future scenarios of the borough, through a lens of Activism, and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. We heard from young people about their concerns, their ambitions for their futures and their communities, and what they think needs to be done to achieve these.

There were common themes arising across all of our engagement, as well as some distinct concerns and priorities that were particularly for certain groups. Common themes among the groups we interviewed were concerns around the cost-of-living crisis and growing inequality, preparation for adulthood, safety, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, provision of youth services and the youth voice.

The young people in youth clubs in the North of the boroughs spoke passionately about racism and 'postcode wars', and what could be done to address this in our communities. Youth Councils and Young Ambassadors were concerned about the Climate emergency and the ability of young people to influence this agenda. A group of girls emphasised the need for girls to feel safer in public and raised mental and physical health as key priorities. The quality of housing and access to support to find employment and training were key concerns for Care Leavers. Children and young people with SEND emphasised the need for place-based cultural and learning opportunities.

2) Methodology and Delivery of workshops

Following the success of the Scenario Book Clubs run by the Staff College, we modelled our workshops on some of the future scenarios used in these sessions. The point of using these future scenarios was to ignite young people's imaginations about the future, what they would like to see and how to make this possible. Whilst young people were able to express their thoughts and concerns about the modern day, they also explored what steps we can take to ensure a brighter future.

For specific groups such as children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, we adapted our sessions to meet their needs. An example of this is the use of Talking Mats, an image-based one-to-one exercise. Children and young people are presented with simple images that represent different areas of their life, and they how they feel about these different images by organising them under other images which represent their feelings. Thumbs up and thumbs down were used in group exercises.

3) Commonalities and key themes

There were many common themes arising in discussions from workshops with different groups. The themes spoken about by the highest number of groups were:

- Youth engagement and youth voice
- Transitions to adulthood
- Inequality (incl. racism and sexism)
- Youth services
- Economy, the cost-of-living crisis and poverty
- Community facilities
- Equality, opportunity and inclusion in education
- Environment and climate change

Transitions to adulthood and inequalities (racism and sexism) were the most commonly held top themes, followed by youth services and youth engagement and voice.

4) Emerging Themes

Transition to Adulthood, including training opportunities and learning

As mentioned by 9 out of 13 groups, a top priority for 8 in 13 groups

This was one of the most popular priorities for our young people, with many concerned that the current educational offer does not equip them with the skills needed for adulthood. Many groups spoke of the need for a 'curriculum for life', teaching financial skills, taxes, and basic economics. Others questioned whether the current curriculum was skilling people for the modern job market – *'Employers and further education centres no longer look for typical triple science, maths subject. Employers want to see variety.'* Our Care Leavers would like to see more support with applications and interviews for courses and jobs.

Our Supported Interns placed emphasis on supporting the transition to adulthood and felt that with further work experience opportunities, a variety of courses, and further speech and language therapy (SLT), they would be equipped for the working world.

Awareness and access to Emotional Well-being and Mental Health

Mentioned by 7 out of 13 groups, a top priority for 1 in 13 groups.

Many young people raised emotional well-being and mental health in the workshops. One group identified schools as being the places where awareness of emotional well-being and mental health should be improved and a place where services should be more readily available. A girl said *'There should be more engagement with children and youths at school to find out what support they need.'*

Safety and violence

Mentioned by 5 out of 13 groups, a top priority for 2 in 13 groups.

Safety was a top concern for young people in our youth clubs, with boys emphasising the impact of postcode wars on aspects of their lives including employment and training opportunities. Young people spoke emotionally about their experiences and fears of 'stop and searches', and strip- searches of young people that have recently been in the media. One young person said *'I'm scared by the recent stories about black youths being strip searched and I'm scared that this could happen to me when I am out and about or at school.'* On the other hand, young people with SEND expressed there should be more police and felt safe when there were police around.

Support for LAC and SEND

Mentioned by 5 out of 13 groups.

These specific areas were highlighted by children and young people with SEND and children who are looked after or were care leavers. Specifically, care leavers spoke of the housing offer, and other services linking heavily to Transition to Adulthood. Young people with SEND spoke highly about feeling safe when their parents and carers were around them and expressed, that they enjoyed extra-curricular activities and being in outdoor spaces like parks.

Equality, Opportunity and Inclusion in Education

Mentioned by 7 out of 13 groups, a top priority for 4 in 13 groups.

In addition to equality more generally, young people felt that *'Opportunities are no way near equal depending on what school you go to'*. It was felt that more could be done in schools to ensure that every child achieves their potential, but for this to happen, approaches to teaching styles and curriculums had to change. Young people also spoke about the type of work experiences available to students depending on the school they attended. One girl in RBKC said *'There is even inequality in access to education – my mum had to ask to borrow money from many family members to afford the school blazer for my state school for me to go there'*.

Youth Services

Mentioned by 9 out of 13 groups, a top priority for 6 in 13 groups.

Young people felt passionate about the clubs and activities that they were involved in. It was apparent that young people wanted to protect and expand what was available and thought that the current offer should be more widely known.

One teenage girl said that *'Girls feel really comfortable here at the youth club- I feel like I can tell youth workers what is really going on, in a way I couldn't at school or home'*.

Teenage boys felt that increasing the frequency of youth clubs was a key way to keep young people away from the dangers on the street and reduce the risk of young people becoming involved in crime and gangs.

Youth Engagement and Voice

Mentioned by 10 out of 13 groups, a top priority for 6 in 13 groups.

This was spoken about by the largest number of groups in our workshops, with many raising young people's engagement and influence seen as a tool to achieve a better future for children and young people. This theme was frequently spoken about in tandem with 'Youth Services (7)'. One young person said that *'No matter where you're from, your background, youth groups provide a space where your voice can be heard'*.

Environment and Climate Change

Mentioned by 7 out of 13 groups, a top priority for 1 in 13 groups.

Climate change was raised by many groups when thinking about the future, with some young people fearing that we would not meet targets and that climate change would get worse. Other groups saw an opportunity for action and activism and were positive about living in a cleaner, greener environment in the future. Some young people also raised concerns that the priorities that matter to the current generation or have mattered to previous generations will not be the same for future generations as they will have to deal with severe weather conditions. Many young people also spoke about animal safety and vegetarianism being the way forward.

Grenfell

Mentioned by 1 group.

Although Grenfell was only explicitly discussed by one group, inequality, racism and not being listened to were spoken about by all the groups in the surrounding Grenfell community.

Economy, cost of living crisis and poverty

Mentioned by 8 out of 13 groups, a top priority for 4 in 13 groups.

Many young people worry that with rising inflation, there will be growing wealth deprivation and a lack of support for those most in need. Some young people spoke about their current situation and highlighted concerns regarding the difficulty in accessing hot water and heating, and this is before the rise in household bills anticipated in October. One young person said that *'This area will become rougher, conditions will be unliveable due to rising inequality, the cost-of-living crisis and a lack of government action.'* Others predicted an increased reliance on food banks and said that already there were children going hungry who do not qualify for free school meals. Quality of housing was raised as an issue in youth clubs. Period poverty was highlighted by girls' groups as something we can tackle by working with schools to provide better access to sanitary products.

Social Media Impact

Mentioned by 4 out of 13 groups, a top priority for 1 in 13 groups.

A number of young people addressed the negative impact social media has on their lives. Many girls spoke about the pressure social media has on appearance, lifestyle, and self-esteem. Young people also spoke about trolling and social media bullying as a popular form of bullying and feared that once information is posted, it is extremely difficult to remove, yet the information is shared instantly. There was a consensus that social media education and the impact of social media should be taught in schools and more awareness is needed, this was raised by many girls. Girls felt more vulnerable and pressured on social media to either *'look a certain way'* or *'behave a certain way'* to fit in. Young people understood the dangers when it came to social media but felt more needed to be done.

Local community and place

Mentioned by 7 out of 13 groups, a top priority for 4 in 13 groups (all SEND)

Access to good local facilities and recreational and cultural spaces was a key priority for our SEND groups. Many of our groups spoke about the importance of having somewhere to go as a young person, such as youth clubs. Many young people felt that the boroughs they lived in did have 'hang out' places but more awareness is needed on what is available and whether there is a criteria as well as costs. Nearly all children and young people with SEND expressed that recreational spaces were vital and they thoroughly enjoyed visiting local parks.

Health

Mentioned by 4 groups.

When health was mentioned, it was done so in relation to inequality and poverty. The girls' group in particular raised health in conversation, focusing on the future of the NHS and women's health. Young people with SEND were asked health questions related to how well they slept, exercised, consumption of fruit and vegetables and whether they felt stressed- nearly all felt they had good health and enjoyed being active.

Inequality (racism and sexism)

Mentioned by 9 out of 13 groups, a top priority for 8 in 13 groups.

Many groups spoke about inequality in the workshops, with racism a key concern for many groups including the youth clubs, Young Ambassadors and Youth Councils. Youth Councils spoke of sexism in education and the workplace, and the girls' group spoke about their lived experience of being black females. Many young people widely accepted that sexism and violence against women and girls still exist, and indifferences need to be addressed by the wider community. Youth club members spoke about their experiences of racial profiling at school and by the police (stop and search). There seemed to be a wider consensus that trust in the police and other authorities is diminishing based on recent racist and violent sexual-related crimes committed by the police, i.e. Child Q and Sarah Everard.

Technology and Innovation

Mentioned by 6 out of 13 groups.

This topic was often mentioned positively, in relation to an increase in equality and opportunities, and as a way for people to speak out for change. Innovation and technological advances were mentioned as paving the future and many existing skilled jobs would be replaced by robots or machinery. There was a real sense of hope for what the future holds when it came to technological advances.

5) Wider Engagement with Residents

In May and June, a survey was shared with the RBKC's Citizen's Panel, Westminster's Resident Research Panel and other residents in Westminster. The survey asked a series of questions around supporting children and young people in the borough, including priorities, concerns and views on provision of facilities. In Kensington and Chelsea, 248 residents responded to the survey, of which 91 described themselves as having parental responsibilities, 44 had care responsibilities, and 15 worked with children and young people. In Westminster, 66 residents responded to the survey, of which 32 described themselves as having parental duties, five were relatives, and eight worked with children and young people.

Among other questions, respondents were asked to rank their top priorities for the Children and Young People's Plan. In both boroughs, respondents ranked Mental Health as the top priority for the plan, closely followed by Education.

Mental Health (63%) was the most popular concern for respondents in Kensington and Chelsea, followed by *'young people may not get opportunities to prepare them for work'* (61%), *'some young people may struggle to get a job'* (58%) and *'some young people's life chances may be adversely affected because of their race or background'* (47%). In Westminster, a third of respondents ranked *'I worry that some people may not have enough to eat'* as their top concern (33%), followed by *'some young people may struggle to get a job'* (27%).

When asked how we might best develop engagement in the Council's delivery of Children's services, *'offering creative apprenticeships'* ranked highest in Kensington and Chelsea, followed by *'Young people's representation in the Council's decision-making forums.'* In Westminster, *'Young people's representation in the Council's decision-making forums'* was the highest-ranking, followed by *'involving young people in designing publications and leaflets.'*

On Kensington and Chelsea's 'online conversation' platform, a new engagement tool we have been involved in testing, we asked residents to share their ideas on how we can broaden opportunities for children and young people. Whilst we have not received enough responses for to fully analyse this method of engagement, the specific feedback that we have received reflected what young people told us.

6) Wider Consultation with Partners, Key Decision Makers and Practitioners

We have also discussed the new plan and its potential scope with partners at sessions with the Local Children's Safeguarding Partnership, chairs of school governors, both Education Partnership Boards and with senior leaders in Children's Services. Lead Members in both boroughs have also been involved in discussions about shaping the plan and our engagement approach. Scrutiny and Select Committees were sighted on plan development at an early stage.

Practitioners will be important in delivering the plan and we held three staff workshops focusing on what the emerging issues might be over the next three years and how staff felt young people they work with would be affected.

Staff and senior leaders identified cost of living, ongoing impact of the pandemic, technological changes, health and wellbeing, changes in ways of working, demographic changes and safeguarding as critical issues. Funding and resources to undertake work and recruitment and retention of experienced and expert staff in critical areas was also felt in need of focused attention.