

Tomorrow's People?

**A guide for overview and scrutiny
committees about involving young
people in scrutiny**



Centre for Public Scrutiny

The Centre for Public Scrutiny is an independent charity that promotes transparent, inclusive and accountable public services and supports and celebrates excellent and effective scrutiny across the public sector. We support scrutineers by producing guidance, creating networks and forums and sharing our expertise through seminars, consultancy, training and events. Our website www.cfps.org.uk contains the largest on-line collection of scrutiny reviews and reports as well as other publications to tell you more about what scrutiny can do for you.

Local Government Group

The LG Group is made up of six organisations:

- Local Government Association (LGA)
- Local Government Improvement and Development (LGID)
- Local Government Employers (LGE)
- Local Government Regulation (LGR)
- Local Partnerships
- Leadership Centre for Local Government

Our shared ambition is to make an outstanding contribution to the success of local government. Together we work with and on behalf of councils to:

- lobby for changes in policy and legislation
- build a strong and positive reputation for local government
- support them and their partnerships to continuously improve and be innovative.

We provide services at the national level which support and are complementary to the regional and local support provided to councils, as well as the work councils themselves undertake.

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1. What this guide is about

This guide aims to help overview and scrutiny committees (OCS) understand the context and 'business case' for involving young people in decision-making and to help them be more effective in including young people in their work.

Overview and scrutiny is an essential part of ensuring that local services are effective and accountable. Scrutiny ensures that executives are held accountable for their decisions, that their decision-making process is clear and accessible to the public and that there are opportunities for the public and their representatives to influence and improve public policy.

Scrutiny is now moving into another era with community-led scrutiny of local decisions, where the public's involvement in challenging local authorities and public service providers on public service improvement and delivery is actively sought by elected representatives. In the context of this guide, constructive and ongoing involvement of young people in scrutiny helps to achieve genuine accountability for the use of public resources.

*"We've been consistently impressed by the quality of input when young people have participated or provided evidence to scrutiny sessions".
Councillor from Westminster*

Involving young people in scrutiny provides a unique perspective on how well public services are being delivered and how they could be improved, from the point of view of their needs and aspirations for their future and that of their communities.

*"Young people often have a different view and vision to adults, and therefore need to be involved in creating a future vision".
Councillor from Chesterfield*

There are several examples of overview and scrutiny committees seeking the views of young people about their experience of services planned and delivered for their age group. Examples of overview and scrutiny reviews that seek the views of young people about issues not directly related to their age group are harder to find.

The guide will help overview and scrutiny committees to play an active role in ensuring that 'what matters to young people' influences difficult decisions about the future funding of public services.

This is not a technical guide about involvement methods and techniques that overview and scrutiny committees can use to hear from young people – guidance about involvement methods and techniques is readily available from a number of organisations (some suggestions are at the end of this guide).

2. Why involving young people is important

The importance of hearing the views of children and young people is recognised internationally. For example, the United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child recognises that children who are capable of forming views should have the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting them and that their views should be given due weight depending on their age and maturity.

The UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has said "youth should be given a chance to take an active part in the decision-making of local, national and global levels". In an effort to harness the energy, imagination and initiative of the world's youth in overcoming current global challenges, the United Nations proclaimed an 'International Year of Youth' starting on 12 August 2010.

In August 2010 an International Labour Organisation report (Global Employment Trends for Youth) about the effects of the global recession on young people, highlighting the heavy price paid by young people around the world. It is clear that young people around the world are on the frontline of current challenges. Although it is easy to assume that this is more prevalent abroad, it is happening in the UK too.

International initiatives to encourage greater involvement of young people in decision-making may seem altruistic and remote, but they set the context for things closer to home. For example, The Princes Trust has reported that the recession will hit hardest in deprived areas, where resources tend to be already scarce for services for young people. Further withdrawal of resources and services for young people will have a high social cost and overview and scrutiny committees can play a vital role in ensuring their views influence difficult decisions about future funding of services.

The Children's Commissioner's report on 'children's participation in decision-making' (2010) noted three key findings:

- most children are generally dissatisfied with their level of input into decision making processes;
- most children did not accept the low status adults often accorded to children's opinions and the lack of explanation on how children's opinions had been taken into account during a decision-making process;
- even very young children can take a very rational and reasoned approach to decision-making – a finding which reiterates the importance of engaging children in participatory processes from a young age - the effect of which is to make children feel respected, valued and active citizens in a shared community.



The British Youth Council 'stronger together' (2010) report shows that enthusiastic young people can still to be found ready to make a difference where they live. It goes on to demonstrate some of the ways that they can take part as citizens both through local youth councils, and as volunteers in wider civil society.

The period up to March 2011 and beyond is likely to see some difficult decisions being made about the way public services are planned and delivered. The UK is facing some significant challenges, for example:

- an ageing society – people living longer with more health and social care needs. At the same time the proportion of people contributing tax revenue to fund services is reducing.
- health inequalities – there are significant differences in life expectancy across the country, between areas and within cities and towns. Access to and outcomes from services are different in different places.
- economic downturn – affecting people’s life chances, impacting their health, well-being and economic activity. Leading to loss of self-esteem and aspiration, relationship breakdown and personal debt.
- public sector deficit – previous levels of investment in public service reform cannot be maintained. Although health and defence spending are protected, other services will have to find significant savings over the next few years.

The outcomes from the Comprehensive Spending Review, announced on 20 October 2010, will mean that councils and their partners need to take some tough decisions about the future funding of services. For example, councils are having to find an average of 28% savings in their budgets over the next 4 years.

Young people will feel the effects of all these issues now and in the future, but they may not feel able to influence them or have confidence in how adults are planning to deal with them. Getting the views of young people is important in order to plan services for the future. This is backed up by international and national legislation, for example the Equalities Act 2010 and the Children Acts 1989 and 2004 that seek to strengthen joint working to better support children and to act in their best interests.

3. What can scrutiny contribute?

In this rapidly moving political and financial environment, there is a vital role for non-executive councillors to influence decisions about planning and delivering services through councils’ overview and scrutiny function.

By hearing from people directly affected by policies and services, overview and scrutiny committees can get an understanding about the services people and communities value. Outcomes from this kind of work could add value to decision-making processes by introducing considerations of 'value', not just 'cost'.



By hearing from young people about what they value in their community and about their aspirations for the future, OSCs will be able to strengthen the evidence-base about what matters to young people, helping those who plan and deliver public services to make judgements about the best ways to achieve short term savings and longer term improvements.

Through their overview and scrutiny function, councils can use a range of creative and innovative ways to gather an evidence base about what matters to young people and how young people would like to see future services planned and delivered around their needs and aspirations.

Overview and scrutiny committees can be a powerful force for improvement and innovation at a local level. They can help councils to strengthen democracy for the future by involving young people in scrutiny as a mechanism for strengthening accountability.

Overview and scrutiny committees have a track record of involving young people in scrutiny reviews about services for young people. However, tackling the challenges ahead will require them to go beyond traditional approaches and engage young people about a much broader range of issues. At a time when difficult decisions need to be made about future funding for public services and when trust in democracy is low, involving young people in scrutiny can strengthen

democratic legitimacy by seeking young people's views on services and issues that are not just young people focused. This can help address some of the issues facing society.

Five examples of involving young people in scrutiny of long term issues rather than 'youth specific' services are set out in this guide. Most of the case studies are taken from active Scrutiny Development Areas being supported by the Centre for Public Scrutiny to tackle deep seated issues in communities.

As well as involving young people directly in scrutiny reviews, overview and scrutiny committees can ask for young people's views about the topics committees should be covering in their work programmes and include them in monitoring implementation of their recommendations.

4. Tips for involving young people in scrutiny

Think about what you ask young people to do (definitions from Save the Children):

Participation refers to taking an active role in a project or a process. By participating, young people have the power to help shape the outcome.

Consultation means listening to young people's views and giving them feedback.

Involvement describes the variety of ways in which young people participate and are consulted.

Think about how young people will do this:

Who to involve - young people of all ages can be involved. It may help to work with people with skills and experience (e.g. youth workers, teachers) as intermediaries, depending on the age or special need of the young people.

Recruit representatives - young people meeting regularly with a specific role can help build relationships but maintaining the same group for a long period of time could be difficult and might not capture 'quiet voices'.

Talk to existing groups - planning around communities' needs by talking to existing groups can break down barriers, but it can be difficult to feedback to everyone.

Hold a one off event - a quick way to hear views but be creative about how you can best attract young people. If you are only meeting once, how will you feedback what has happened to the ideas?

Young mentors or young researchers - young people respond to other young people. Using young mentors can help make connections and break down barriers. To get a young person's perspective of services, think about using young researchers.

Use social media - young people regularly use the internet and mobile technology to communicate. Think about how you can use these tools to inform and gather views.

A range of methods and styles – success usually means using a range of ways depending on who you want to reach and the time available. For example, the case study about work in Sefton shows how very young people can be engaged.

Be clear and honest about the role of young people in the review

Make the process fun and positive as this will get the best out of young people

Be creative so that you hear as many voices as possible

Respect the ideas you hear and always feedback

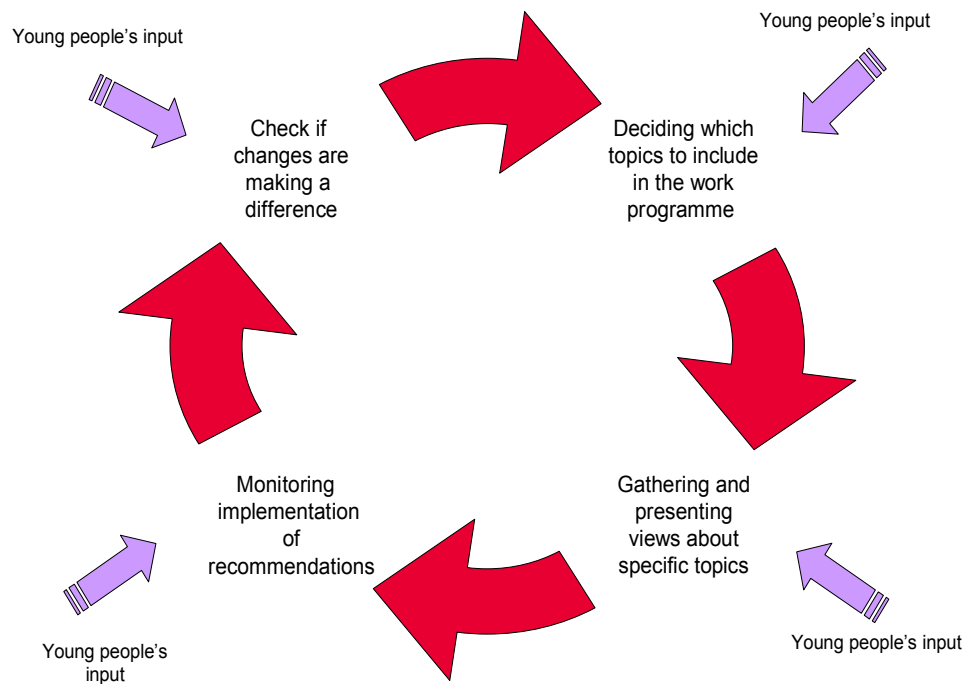
Think about venues, appropriate times of the day/academic year and transport

Don't rely only on traditional methods

Demonstrate the difference to the decision or service that has happened due to their involvement

Always consider child protection

There are opportunities to involve young people throughout the whole 'scrutiny cycle', as illustrated in the diagram;



5. Examples of involving young people in scrutiny

Chesterfield

Chesterfield's Health Profile for 2009 indicated a life expectancy for men and women living in Chesterfield significantly lower than the England average. This is particularly stark in the Rother community. Chesterfield wanted to take a different approach to understanding and supporting these communities. As part of a wider project supported by the Centre for Public Scrutiny, Chesterfield are helping to develop techniques that can be used across the country to understand and tackle deep seated health inequalities.

An Appreciative Inquiry¹ (AI) approach is helping to develop a model of scrutiny which identifies 'what works' and how to improve services by building on what works. The review brings providers and residents together so that they know what they can build on to create a future both agencies and local people have jointly agreed they want.

¹ AI aims to identify 'what works' in communities, rather than trying to fix 'what doesn't.' Instead of focusing on gaps and problems, AI focuses on how to build on assets that exist already

Young people from Parkside School in Rother told their stories about what is good about Rother at a community event which was a central aspect of the scrutiny project.

“Young people are playing an important part in sharing aspirations and designing a better future for their area”, explained Councillor Jane Collins, Chair of the Health Inequalities Scrutiny Committee. “Young people often have a different view and vision to adults, and therefore need to be involved in creating a future vision and encouraged to be involved in making it happen, whilst also learning from the experiences of adults. Young people are being involved and empowered to help shape their own futures and happiness. Ultimately, as indicated by the Marmot Review, health and wellbeing is influenced by how happy people are - not just how long people live but their quality of life”.

Two young people who took part, Sophie and Megan, report that they felt proud to be involved and pleased that community representatives listened to what they had to say and were very interested. They really enjoyed sharing their stories and the experience of addressing the community at the event which gave them added confidence and they enjoyed and felt valued to be part of this community work.

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Westminster

Involving young people adds value and Councillors decided to create a Young People’s Scrutiny Panel. This is Westminster’s first scrutiny group made up entirely of young people, consisting of 8-15 young people aged between 16-19, supported by staff from Youth Services and the Member Services scrutiny team.

This Panel is running until early summer 2011, reporting back to the full Children and Young People Policy and Scrutiny Committee. This will not replace the existing ways in which young people are involved in the democratic function of the Council – in fact it will help to enhance their involvement and help to raise the profile of young people’s views.

In addition to influencing the Council and partner’s work, there will be personal development gains for young people. Supported by officers, during their reviews they will develop new skills in research and evidence collection, running meetings, learning how services are

delivered via site visits, interview skills and presentation techniques, report writing and many more key skills. The Panel will meet senior politicians and officers and organise its own press coverage. The young people will produce a report which will be presented to the Children and Young People Policy and Scrutiny Committee for consideration before going to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services.

Facilitators have run a session on local services, asking how the young people perceive Westminster and what their positive and negative experiences are of living in the borough. From the feedback, they were able to prioritise issues they might want to investigate. Officers are now identifying ways to develop a wider network to keep all young people up to date about the Panel's work.

Cllr Ian Adams, Chairman of the Children and Young People Policy and Scrutiny Committee, says "we've been consistently impressed by the quality of input when young people have participated or provided evidence to scrutiny sessions, so we thought it was high time for them to be given a chance to set their own agenda for scrutiny. Young people are often more informed than they are given credit for and can offer valuable alternative viewpoints on key issues.

The fact that scrutiny could also contribute to the personal development of young people at the same time made it a simple win-win scenario. Having it count toward the service element of the Duke of Edinburgh award is definitely a big bonus in terms of providing an incentive to participate and giving something back to those involved".

Two young people involved in the review commented that;

"the Panel is a brilliant opportunity to express what we feel is important and to scrutinise what we want changed and improved"

"I joined the Panel to contribute to my community and make a difference".

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Hillingdon

As various levels of crime continue to increase, the need for public surveillance has become an essential tool for public safety. Hillingdon were keen to carry out a review of public perceptions of CCTV, including the views of different parts of the community. Evidence showed a general consensus in favour of CCTV but the Overview and Scrutiny Committee identified a significant number of changes and potential improvements that were recommended to Cabinet.

Two members of the Youth Council took part in one of the Committee meetings, explaining that they believed many of the crimes caught on CCTV were directly linked to alcohol and drug abuse by young people. Members talked directly to more young people to find out how much young people knew about CCTV use in the borough, whether they felt CCTV surveillance was directed at young people and if they would welcome the increased use of surveillance or whether they would feel victimised.

The Committee learned that contacting young people to gain their views was very useful when undertaking scrutiny reviews as they provide scrutiny reviews with a different perspective on the topic at hand. Members expressed their delight with the way that the young people presented their evidence and would work with them again on future projects. Furthermore, the young people can get their views across and gain experience of sitting in on Committee meetings.

Young people involved in the review commented that:

“I thought it was going to be a daunting task – but this was not the case, I was happy to contribute”

“It was nice that someone had actually taken how young people felt into consideration as some young people felt victimised by surveillance”.

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Salford

Salford identified smoking as the greatest cause of deaths associated with health inequalities. From previous work using Appreciative Inquiry (AI), they had identified that local health cultures may be detrimental to health equity, and were determined to do something about it, starting from the evidence that the decrease in smoking prevalence is due to the increase in people who have never or occasionally smoked rather than the proportion of people who have given up.

It decided to use the AI approach again, starting with communities rather than services and involve the whole system – e.g. service providers, partners etc. in Walkden, an area with high smoking prevalence. It was discovered that people who have never become regular smokers identified as non-smokers before the age of 20. Young people are playing an essential role in the inquiry - non-smoking youngsters from two local high schools, a training project and STA-MP (Salford Tobacco Action - Mission Possible) a young people's group who campaign on tobacco issues. The inquiry aims to paint a more visible and positive picture of the lives of non smokers in the local community, young people saying they want to shape their lives differently from smoking peers or family members.

The OSC ran the 'Big Conversation', providing space for local people to celebrate their success stories and agree a vision for the future for Walkden. The event included local residents covering a wide age range, people from local businesses and front-line workers as well as managers, councillors and many others. People came from community and voluntary sector groups, the council, health services, the police and fire services. There were several young people at the event – and as the day went on you could see how the young people were increasingly shaping the vision for the future of their community. One young resident said it was 'nice to be asked. It is good someone is asking us for a change'.

Judith Emanuel an expert in AI and support consultant to the committee explains;

“We used a whole system approach and got everyone together to talk about Winning Ways in Walkden, a title chosen by a local woman. It was extraordinary how different the story was if you start from what works. We got some amazing stories from young people who are successful non-smokers against unbelievable odds - like the young woman who could sing and told everyone she did not smoke to save

her voice. Having the young people there made an enormous difference to how we all behaved. The whole group identified in their vision that they wanted young people's solutions to be respected and acted on. That is not to say that young people are the only people who should be involved, their communities are important too".

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Sefton

Sefton has affluent areas sitting next to deprived communities. The OSC wanted to contextualise what they already know about the area by looking at how families lead their lives – e.g. what they eat, where they go and what they do. They also wanted to understand what works well, what could be better and what their future aspirations are. The aim of the review is to find out whether support and community networks beyond traditional health services impacted upon health outcomes. They described this as the 'glue' of how we live our lives.

The OSC wanted to move beyond 'data' to 'insight through experience' and adopted a community engagement approach through three primary schools. Working with primary age children is new for Sefton, helping to gain insight into the experiences of local families through the lens of pupils aged 5 and 6, working with the voluntary, community and faith sector. Year 1 and Year 2 children are still relatively immune to health marketing messages that perhaps may have influenced the participation and feedback from older children.

To facilitate innovative and active involvement, a local community artist was commissioned, who through a creative arts project 'Me, My Life and My Community' engaged the children in re-creating their daily lives, using a large dolls house with four separate scenes; home, school, community and aspirations. Children were invited to create characters to fill the dolls house re-enacting their family and community life. A range of techniques were used to gain insight into the lives of families such as drawing of self portraits, pass the parcel games, creating figures and characters which all culminated in an exhibition of work and a celebration event in schools for the children, their families and the elected members.

Members have already seen some early benefits in terms of developing understanding and insight into what impacts on health outcomes. Early outcomes from the work have indicated that social networks, local institutions such as school, after school activities, the lollipop lady and the police are key features in their quality of life. Whilst some children lived in lone parent households both parents and extended families featured greatly in their lives and pictures, which the children all celebrated in their work and games. Schools, particularly primary schools, are at the heart of our communities and we need to build on these community assets to deliver improved outcomes for our population.

“I have been involved in this Review from the outset as a local Vicar who was concerned about the health of the local community. Seeing daily the negative impact that poor health can have on families, and having to support families that have experienced the early death of a key adult from things that might have been avoidable, I know that this has an impact on the whole community. I am committed to learning from what our children tell us so that we can develop plans that seek to tackle health inequalities in a different way”

Canon Roger Driver

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Hackney

During a recent review of 'Estate Safety and Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour', London Borough of Hackney wanted to address the perception that most anti-social behaviour is caused by kids hanging out and being intimidating. The Scrutiny Commission wanted to understand what young people's views were - notably what their own fears were, what sort of anti-social behaviour most affected them, and how we could improve reporting methods?

Recognising that a bunch of councillors and officers in suits wielding a survey was unlikely to gain the best output from young people on housing estates, the OSC worked closely with the Hackney Youth Parliament, who then took the questionnaires onto the streets and in to youth clubs. The response from young people was far better than could have been achieved without their involvement. Views from the Youth Parliament itself were useful too. A significant amount of

preparation went in to it from the Scrutiny side, including a full Saturday session with the Youth Parliament to draft the survey and plan the approach to gaining feedback. We also needed to balance other pressures on young people's time with the need to meet the Scrutiny Commission's tight reporting deadlines.

We were fortunate that the Youth Parliament had already received some consultation training, and working closely with the council's Youth Services meant we could rely on the support of enthusiastic staff who, importantly, already had relevant Criminal Records Bureau checks.

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6. Further resources

British Youth Council - www.byc.org.uk

Children's Commissioner - www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk

Children's Workforce Development Council - www.cwdcouncil.org.uk

Hear by Right - www.nya.org.uk/quality/hear-by-right/about-hear-by-right

Involve - www.involve.org.uk

International Labour Organisation – www.ilo.org

Local Government Improvement and Development – www.idea.gov.uk/empowerment

Participation Works Partnership - www.participationworks.org.uk

People and Participation – www.peopleandparticipation.net

Prince's Trust - www.princes-trust.org.uk

Save the Children - www.savethechildren.net

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