

Children and Young People's Democratic Engagement Strategy for the City of Sunderland 2005-2010. Cabinet Paper (Final Draft)

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Reference to priorities:

- Education Single Plan 3
- Children and Young People Plan
- Sunderland Strategy
- Performance Improvement Plan: Young People
- Corporate Plan
- Comprehensive Performance Assessment
- Every Child Matters – The Children's Bill (make a positive contribution)
- Sunderland Youth Service Ofsted Action Plan
- Hear By Right

Consideration by Cabinet September 2005

1. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STRATEGY?

The purpose of this strategy is to provide a framework for the continued development of the active engagement of young people in democratic and participatory processes towards the fulfilment of a corporate partnership between the City Council and other key stakeholders with young people.

2. WHAT IS OUR VISION AND PRINCIPLES?

The vision is to build on the work set out in the original Youth Strategy 2000 – 2005, by bringing the strategy up-to-date and in doing so reinforce the City of Sunderland's commitment to the involvement of children and young people in the governance and decision-making process of services they access. This strategy will focus on the democratic engagement of children and young people and will form part of a suite of documents relevant to development and engagement of children and young people.

This strategy incorporates key principles of Hear by Right standards for the active involvement of children and young people, which is a national standard developed by the National Youth Agency and the Local Government Association.

It is also underpinned by the UN Conventions of the Rights of the Child – Article 12, which recognises the rights of children and young people to be listened to when decisions are made that affect them.

This strategy aims to provide the structure for children and young people to have:

- A voice
- Platforms for their voices to be heard
- Representation to ensure action takes places

3. WHAT IS THE CURRENT POSITION?

Since the original Youth Strategy was written there have been major changes in national and local policies.

On a national level:

- Children and young people's services are subject to change following the introduction of the Children's Bill and the Youth Green Paper – Youth Matters.
- The Local Government Association and National Youth Agency have produced and updated 'Hear by Right' – a standard for youth participation.
- City of Sunderland has signed a Service Level Agreement with the UK Youth Parliament.
- The Government through its youth policy has signalled its intention to support the active engagement of children and young people as citizens.

On a local level:

- Young people have not been identified as a specific priority area, but are a cross cutting theme in the Sunderland Strategy.
- The Youth Development Group has been re-structured, and now commissions frontline services from the Voluntary Sector whilst retaining core functions of Quality Assurance, Training and Accreditation, and Youth Strategy.
- The development of the Children's Board for the City has a seat for one of the elected Members of the UK Youth Parliament.
- OFSTED has inspected the Youth Service in September 2004, with positive outcomes and recommendations for continued improvement. These are being implemented.
- Young people are actively engaged with the Culture and Leisure Review Committee, and representatives from Sunderland Youth Parliament have been identified to attend the Education Review Committee.
- A Director of Children's Service has been appointed, a process that included young people.
- Youth documentation and curriculum have been re-written to the five outcomes of Every Child Matters.

The staffing and organisation of the Youth Strategy has undergone comprehensive change. The current Youth Strategy Officer came into post in March 2003 took on the management of the Youth Participation Team and joined the Youth Development Group's management team.

The development of this strategy is a priority within the:

- Education Single Plan
- Youth Development Group Plan

The work also features within other strategic documents and plans including:

- Sunderland Strategy
- Performance Improvement Review Young People: Engaging and Delivering Service Improvement Plan
- Young People's Strategic Partnership
- Youth Development Group, Connexions and Sunderland Voluntary Sector Youth Forum Partnership Plan

- Area Regeneration Plans
- Keyfund
- Corporate Plan
- Comprehensive Performance Assessment Action Plan
- Sunderland Youth Service Ofsted Action Plan
- Children and Young People Plan

Currently there are youth committees and forum groups at neighbourhood project and school council level, but this is not the case in every individual unit. Indeed, one of the OFSTED recommendations in the Sunderland Youth Service Inspection Report is to 'involve young people more in the development and evaluation of projects and programmes especially at unit level'. This is in Inspection Action Plan.

At an area level Coalfield Youth Forum was established in February 2004, and Washington Youth Action Committee was established in 2000, and will take on the role of Washington Youth Forum with new members that have recently been recruited. Young people are engaged in the development of youth forums in the East and West areas. Work in the North and South Areas are currently at the planning stage.

On a citywide level Sunderland Youth Parliament has been in existence since 2000 and its current members form a working group to push forward its future development. Indeed, this group has been particularly effective in its work attracting recognition from the media most notably coverage on ITV's political programme 'Around the House' including positive comments from Ofsted's Chief Inspector who referred to the work as citizenship in action. Through work linked with UK Youth Parliament one of the young people was a main feature of the BBC's Politics Show in the run up to the 2005 elections. Sunderland Youth Parliament received the City of Sunderland Young Achievers Award in 2005 for service to the community in the group category. This group has worked in partnership with the business community in developing Business Week 2005, the Sunderland Echo with the production of the Street magazine, and the City Council with the first Young People's State of the City Debate with feedback at the 2005 State of City Debate.

There has also been the development of thematic and specific service groups that operate on a citywide basis.

Such groups include:

- Social Services groups 4UM and Speak Your Mind, which engaged young people in the looked after care system.
- City Equals, an engagement group for young people who have physical/learning disabilities.
- Youth Committee at Young Asian Voices.
- Learning is Fun, which is a young people's education conference planning group.
- Young Educators: Advisors on Health (YEAH) group, which is a group that works with the Sunderland NHS Teaching Primary Care Trust.
- Connexions Youth Engagement Group.

A Youth Participation Network was created in Sunderland during 2004 and is used to support, guide, co-ordinate and monitor the development of youth participation work in the city. Currently there are 40 organisations listed as members. Membership renewal will begin in September 2005 and, as such, a push to extend the membership will take place.

4. The Proposed Strategy

A consultation process has been undertaken with young people, practitioners, voluntary sector, managers, officers and Elected Members that has led to the focus on developing and implementing the following structure of this strategy.

Three Tier Structure

This strategy provides a three-tier structure to link neighbourhood, area and citywide youth engagement groups to a network that feeds into the Sunderland Youth Parliament.

- Tier one – neighbourhood level. This will include youth provision, school councils and service user groups. The Youth Strategy Team will seek to support, advise and guide local initiatives in the development of youth participation rather than deliver the work directly. The secondary age schools will be invited to consult widely within their own establishments.

The approach to youth participation within this tier, and within each of the other tiers, should not be restricted to formal groups or approaches but should be encouraged to be creative using various methods including music, art and drama in order for young people to exercise their voice.

- Tier two – area level. An Area Youth Forum will be developed for each of the geographical areas of Sunderland with direct links to the appropriate Council Area Committee. The Youth Strategy Team will seek to work with local partners to develop Area Youth Forums with and encourage them to lead on these initiatives. During the financial year 2005/6 the Youth Strategy Team will be able to provide financial resources from its Strategic Initiatives Budget allocation to support this development. In addition support will be available from the Youth Strategy Team in terms of advice, guidance, training and where necessary direct involvement from staff in service delivery.

However, there will be a significant funding pressure in 2006/7 and beyond as the Youth Strategy Team's Strategic Initiatives Budget is due to be reduced to an annual allocation of £50,000. This in comparison to the 2005/6 budget of £97,938 achieved through the use of the previous years under spend. The aim will be to support the continued development work of Area Youth Forums once established via applications to the Area Committees.

Young people would be recruited from tier one initiatives or directly. A group size of 15-20 would be a feasible number to work with effectively, however group size should not be rigid and should reflect the meaningful contribution young people can make. The group members would be responsible for developing appropriate approaches to the needs of the group and should not be restricted to creating formalised systems. This has to be balanced against the need for the work of the group to be recorded, communicated and acted upon in such a way that is accessible beyond the membership of the group.

Each Area Youth Forum would need to develop direct links with their Area Committee, and where appropriate other area based practitioners or community forums. The development of such links is vital to ensure the City Council's corporate partnership with young people is achieved at an area level. In addition links with professionals at this level will help facilitate and support this process.

- Tier three – citywide and strategic level. This is the level at which young people contribute to the governance of the City Council with a major focus on the Children’s Service.

To achieve this, strategic groups will be created to reflect the outcome areas of Every Child Matters and Children’s Bill legislation. The outcome areas are:

- Be healthy
- Stay safe
- Enjoy and achieve
- Achieve economic well-being
- Make a positive contribution

Existing groups whose purpose best match an outcome area of Every Child Matters would be encouraged to take the lead and represent this on the Sunderland Youth Parliament. Groups with similar aims would be encouraged to work collaboratively on a particular outcome area. A group that takes on a lead on one of the Every Child Matters groups would not be excluded from engaging in the other outcome areas, and communication systems across the strategic groups would be established to support and facilitate this.

Provision will be made through a number of ‘Positive Contribution’ groups to ensure that the young people’s voices from minority groups are represented within the structure and subsequently on Sunderland Youth Parliament.

Each of the Every Child Matters groups would need to ensure that strong links are established and maintained with the appropriate Senior Officer and Elected Member of the Local Authority, as well as creating links with the service providers. These groups would not be developed as isolated functions but would be encouraged to attract members from associated groups with a similar focus. A system of communication would be required across each of the Every Child Matters groups in order for young people to contribute to the other outcome areas.

Sunderland Youth Parliament will draw its membership from Area Youth Forums as well as Every Child Matters outcome groups. Provision will be made within Sunderland Youth Parliament to accommodate five members from each of the Area Youth Forums and Every Child Matters groups. Provision will also be made to accommodate Sunderland’s two elected members of the UK Youth Parliament, their two deputies and a place for the young member of the City’s Children’s Board.

Based upon six Area Youth Forums and five Every Child Matters groups with the UK Youth Parliament and Children’s Board representatives a Sunderland Youth Parliament of 60 young people would be possible. However the intention to create further ‘Positive Contribution’ groups will increase the size of the Parliament further. The full Parliament would meet three times per year and would determine and monitor its priorities.

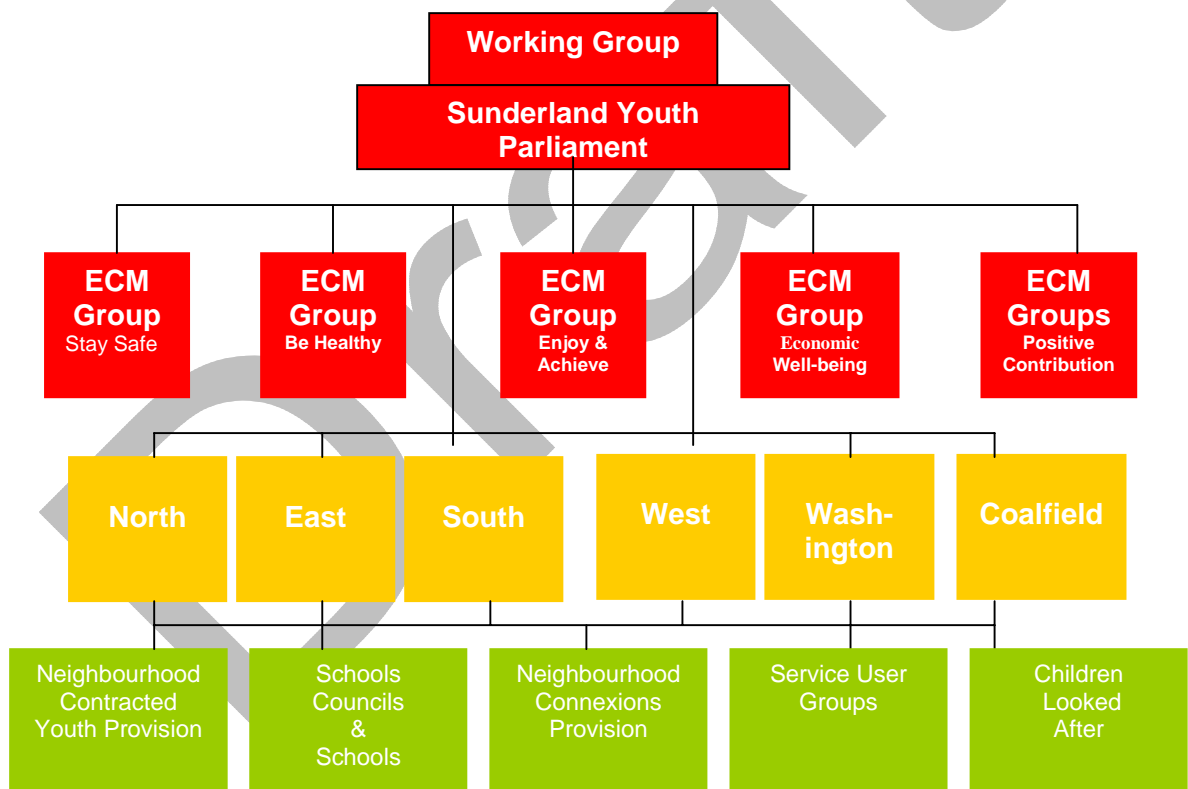
To progress the work on behalf of the larger Sunderland Youth Parliament a working group would be utilised. Membership of this working group would be selected from the full Sunderland Youth Parliament group. This working group would ideally need to have representatives from each of the six Area Youth Forums and the Every Child Matters outcome groups. Provision would also be

made for Sunderland's two elected members of the UK Youth Parliament, their two elected deputies as well as the Children's Board representation.

Provision would be made for two young people from each Area Youth Forum and the Every Child Matters groups. Along with the UK Youth Parliament and Children's Board representatives the group would potentially consist of 29 people, or more dependant upon the number of positive contribution groups that are established.

In order to maintain the effectiveness of the current Sunderland Youth Parliament, the working group would need to be divided into smaller task groups with members taking on different responsibilities with Wednesday's 5-7 pm sessions focusing on agreed tasks and Thursday 5-7 pm session concentrating on media work. Further sessions will be arranged dependent upon need in addition to the weekly meetings.

This option is illustrated in the diagram below.



From this local basis a foundation will be created in order to develop links beyond the city boundaries. Links at a regional (tier 4), national (tier 5) and international (tier 6) will be encouraged and supported by the Youth Strategy Team.

Supporting the Strategy

This strategy is in place to support the active engagement of young people in democratic decision-making processes. In order to facilitate this the strategy itself requires a practical support structure.

This will be achieved through a combination of three categories of stakeholders. These are:

- Young people
- Elected members of Sunderland City Council
- Professionals and practitioners engaged in participatory work with young people.

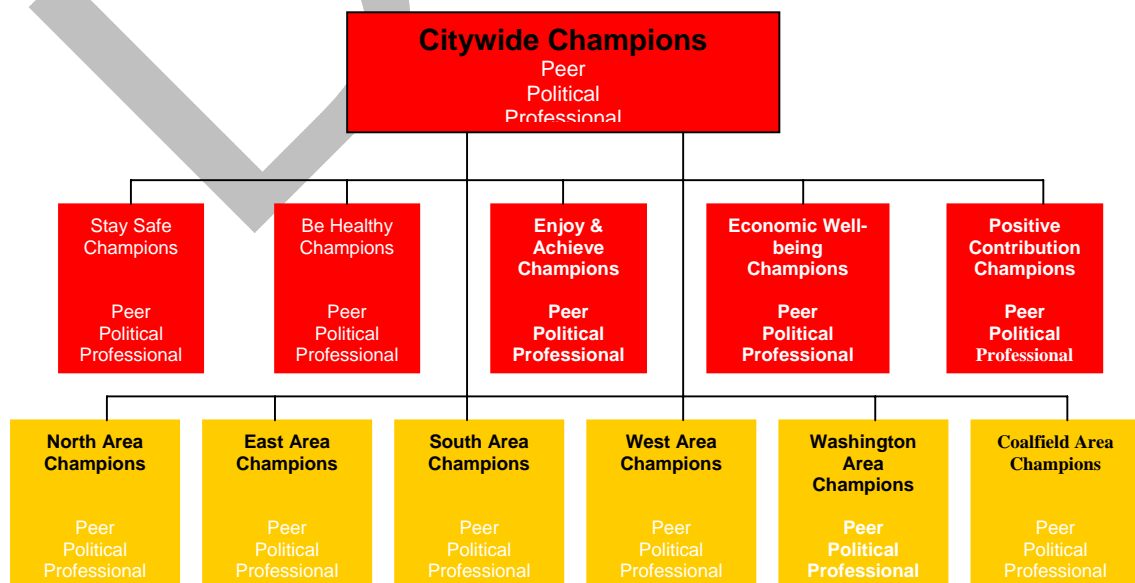
The strategy so far has concentrated on the young people’s structures. This strategy also proposes the development of Children and Young People’s Champions. Based upon the structure illustrated above a network of Champions would be developed representing the six areas of the City and the Every Child Matters outcome areas with overall Champions representing and advocating on behalf of children and young people across the City.

The Network of Champion would consist of the following:

- Peer Champions (young people) who would be recruited from the young people on the Sunderland Youth Parliament Working Group.
- Political Champions would be recruited from the City Council’s Elected Members and selected on the basis on areas of responsibility and interest.
- Professional/Practitioner Champions would be recruited from key people from the City Council and or partner agencies who are engaged in the development of participatory work or have a strong interest in supporting young people in decision-making processes.

The Champions would be required to work together towards the collective goal of supporting children and young people in decision-making processes and achieving the aims of this strategy.

Training would be an essential part of becoming a Champion and Sunderland Youth Parliament Working Group would conduct the recruitment and selection of Champions. This Champion’s structure is illustrated below:



As with the diagram presented previously to represent the structure of the strategy this model also provides for additional 'Positive Contribution' Champions in order to include provision for under represented groups.

In addition to the Children and Young People's Champions, Sunderland Youth Participation Network will also support the strategy. This network exists to bring together practitioners and managers of initiatives engaged in participatory work with young people. The Network will take on the remit of the Involving Children and Young People Group that links to the Children's Trust, and will provide a direct link for the practitioners to advocate on behalf of Children and Young People.

It is critical that effective communications systems are in place to facilitate the voice of the Network as well as for the Children's Trust to communicate with practitioners and projects engaged in this work with children and young People. This will also be another mechanism for children and young people to have their voices listened to by the Children's Trust via its Executive Group, therefore, additional emphasis and resources are required to develop appropriate communication systems including the development of web based approaches with young people.

5. Resourcing the Strategy

The Citywide Strategic Initiatives Budget and the Education Directorate through the Youth Development Group currently provide the core funding for the Youth Strategy Team who will lead on the development and implementation of this strategy. The Strategic Initiatives Budget provides an annual allocation of £50,000 but additional funding has been made available in recent years due to under spend being carried forward from previous years resulting in a £97,938 budget in 2005/06. However, the budget returns to £50,000 per annum in 2006/7. The Youth Development Group already provide administrative and youth work resources through the merging on the Youth Participation Team with the Youth Strategy. As part of the restructure of the Youth Development Group the Youth Strategy Team has been allocated two full-time Youth Participation Officers with administrative support. This allocation was phased in during 2004/5 and was fully in place by April 2005. Part-time staffing will continue with specific areas of responsibilities in support of the strategy, with funding allocated from the sources above.

The table below illustrates the Youth Strategy Team and funding source.

Post	Contracted hours per week	SIB Funding (Hours per week)	YDG Funding (Hours per week)
Youth Strategy Officer	37	37	-
Youth Participation Officer	37	-	37
Youth Participation Officer	37	-	37
Senior Youth Worker	27 ½	17 ½	10
Senior Youth Worker	10	-	10
Senior Youth Worker	5	5	-
Support Worker	1 ½	1 ½	-

The return to a £50,000 per annum Strategic Initiatives Budget allocation will mean a reduction in the capacity to issue new contracts to the two Senior Youth Workers and Support Worker who are employed on fixed term contracts. There would also be a reduced capacity to deliver on the strategy unless alternative funding is found to replace this deficit.

The development of the Every Child Matters groups will place a responsibility on existing services to continue to support the engagement of young people through current levels of funding and allocation of staffing.

The development of Area Youth Forums will be directly supported by a Youth Participation Officer and from the Youth Strategy Team's Strategic Initiatives Budget in 2005/06. Development costs of Area Youth Forums and additional staffing from 2006/07 onwards will require funding from Area Committees via Strategic Initiative Budget applications.

The development of partnerships will be a key feature of the future development of this strategy and funding of new initiatives will be achieved collaboratively with young people and key stakeholders.

Recognition and rewards for children and young people

Across Sunderland there are different approaches in relation to how young people are recognised for their contribution, some in the form of individual payment either in cash or through vouchers of various types. There are also collective rewards in the form of group activities. Travel expenses are often covered as well as refreshments at meetings.

Individuals and groups have also benefited through their work and experience being accredited from a range of awarding bodies.

The motivation for young people to be involved in this activity needs to be that they want to participate, and feel that their contribution can make a difference to themselves and their peers. However, it is important that young people are not taken for granted and that their efforts are appropriately recognised.

To achieve this the young people or their families should not be out of pocket as part of their engagement in decision-making processes of the City Council and partner agencies. Therefore, travel expenses need to be met by the Youth Strategy and partner agencies' budgets.

There should be an emphasis on group rewards, which are budgeted for and determined by the groups. Where young people have engaged in an area of work the City Council or partner agency would ordinarily be expected to pay for, then payments of some form should be encouraged and agreed with young people.

All work carried out by young people involved in decision making processes is ideally suited to receive accreditation and be included in their Record of Achievements. To facilitate this the Youth Strategy Team has become an access organisation for the Duke of Edinburgh's Award in Sunderland for the Service Section. The Youth Development Group also hosts the full Duke of Edinburgh Awards programme in Sunderland, and also the Mayors Award. Other accreditation routes are available and should be encouraged.

6. Monitoring, reporting and evaluating the strategy

The implementation and development of this strategy will need to be highly accountable to young people and key stakeholders with clear evidence of work carried out, progress of young people and the impact of the strategy.

In order to ensure that the legislative requirements of The Children's Bill relating to each outcome area of Every Child Matters are met and adequately supported. This strategy will need to be clearly identified and strategically placed within the future Children's Service. The role of the Youth Participation Network as previously highlighted would have a crucial role within the monitoring, reporting and continuous evaluation of this strategy.

This strategy is a priority and a feature of the range of action plans previously presented in section three of this document. As a result this strategy has a high level of accountability within existing mechanisms of the City Council and this will be the basis for its future monitoring, evaluation and reporting.

A function of the Sunderland Youth Parliament Working Group would be to monitor the implementation of the strategy and to advise on its future development.

Evaluation will be achieved through:

- Youth Strategy Team meetings
- Youth Participation Network
- Sunderland Youth Parliament Working Group
- Young People's Inspection Team
- Youth Development Group's Management Information System
- Youth Development Group's Quality Assurance Team

Reporting will need to be a regular feature of this strategy in order to maintain high levels of accountability to young people and other key stakeholders.

Reporting will be achieved through:

- Youth Development Group Management Team meetings
- Reporting on actions stated in Education Single Plan and other key strategic plans
- Strategic Initiatives Budget monitoring returns
- Regular meetings of Sunderland Youth Parliament Working Group
- Regular meetings of Youth Participation Network
- Production and circulation of high quality publications aimed at young people and other versions aimed at adult stakeholders produced by the Youth Strategy Team with young people.
- Education Review Committee.

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Appendix 1 – Consultation Process

This strategy has been developed in stages with consultation running throughout the process. Consultation has taken place with young people from:

- Sunderland Youth Parliament
- Young Asian Voices
- City Equals
- Connexions Youth Engagement Group
- 2 children's homes

Professionals and practitioners from:

- Youth Development Group
- Social Services
- Education Directorate
- Performance Improvement Team
- Connexions
- Community and Cultural Services
- Regeneration and Development
- Youth Participation Network including Voluntary Sector providers
- Elected Members of Sunderland City Council

Consultation was carried out in four stages as indicated below:

- First consultative draft – July 2004 (completed)
- Consultation period – July 2004 to October 2004 (completed)
- Second consultative draft – December 2004 (completed)
- Consultation period – December 2004 to February 2005 (Completed)
- Third consultation draft – February 2005
- Consultation and development period – March 2005 – August 2005 (completed)
- Strategy document prepared for Cabinet (completed)

The first consultation period focused on strategic personnel and young people, the second period on practitioners who work with young people, the third period focused on elected members. The final stage focused on the development of some of the finer details of the strategy with key personnel.