

Overview & Scrutiny

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Cllr Anntionette Bramble
(Cabinet Member for Children, Education & Children's Social Care)
&
Cllr Caroline Woodley (Cabinet Member for Early Years, Families and Play)

Dear Cllr Bramble and Cllr Woodley,

Child Friendly Borough

At its meeting in January 2020, the Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission discussed the Councils approach to developing Child Friendly Borough. This was a wide-ranging discussion which not only assessed how children and young people were currently involved in local consultation processes but also considered plans to develop a Special Planning Document (SPD) that would provide guidance to prospective developers to ensure that future local development was more child friendly across Hackney.

The Commission was very thankful to you both, council officers and external representatives from ZCD Architects, Build Up and Hackney Quest who contributed to this discussion, and who helped to make this an informative and productive session. The Commission was particularly thankful for the participation of a number of young people, including representatives from Hackney Youth Parliament, Entity and the Young Futures Commission, all of whom provided critical insight into discussions.

The aim of the session was to identify a number of conclusions and recommendations which may help to guide and inform the councils approach to developing a Child Friendly Borough, and in particular, the Child Friendly SPD. Whilst full details of all the evidence presented at the Commission can be found [here](#), the following provides a summary of the key findings.

Consultation and engagement with young people

The Commission noted that there is considerable good work already taking place within and across the council which successfully engage and involve young people. As a result of continued investment, the council has well established structures through which to engage and involve young people (e.g. Hackney Youth Parliament and local Youth Hubs). The Commission noted that the Hackney Youth Charter provided a solid foundation from which to build and extend participation of local young people. Evidence presented to the Commission would suggest that HYP embodies these principles, is open and reflective, and is seeking new ways to extend involvement of children and young people locally.

The Young Futures Commission (YFC) has also been successful in engaging large numbers of local young people who have provided new and significant insights about their lived experiences of growing up in Hackney. The Commission noted that this work is already delivering significant benefits with consultation data being used to enrich and inform decision making across the council.

The YFC has also empowered local young people to become actively involved, not only as members but also through training them to be peer researchers and facilitators. A number of contributors to this session, including a number of young people themselves, highlighted the importance of providing training and skill development as part engagement strategies with young people. This skills and learning approach not only enabled more meaningful contributions, but also empowers young people to be active citizens in their community beyond the duration of a specific consultation.

Given the scale and breadth of its work, it is anticipated that the conclusions and recommendations detailed in final reporting will help shape the council's consultation framework through which to engage and involve young people in the future. To ensure that there is this lasting legacy for the council and of course for young people, there will need to be a clear plan on how the outcomes of this work are embedded across the council.

Analysis of the evidence presented by stakeholders at this session, much of which was based on working with young people in local projects, identified a number of key principles which might also contribute to the councils approaches to consultation with young people and should be considered alongside the outcomes of YFC. To summarise:

- Whenever possible, young people should be engaged and consulted in those settings in which they naturally congregate, feel safe and communicate freely;
- There should be flexibility in the approaches to engaging young people in local consultations which reflect the differing degree of involvement and time commitments that young people may have;
- Where possible, approaches to consultation should aim to further develop the knowledge, skills and understanding of young people, not only to facilitate their ongoing and future participation but also to enable them to reach out and cascade information and learning to their peers;
- Whilst social media is an important tool in reaching out and initially engaging young people, face-to-face methods, preferably with other young people as researchers, would appear to be most beneficial in obtaining deeper qualitative insight in to their lived experience;

- Young people should be recompensed for their contribution to consultations, not only in recognition of their time and expertise, but also to acknowledge the value that their insight brings and to provide parity with how adults may be engaged (and who are generally compensated).
- It should be acknowledged that parents play an important role in shaping the views of young people, and maintain a significant influence over the way that young people engage with and utilise facilities for them. As such, parents should continue to be recognised as important stakeholders in consultation approaches involving young people.

Special Planning Document - Child Friendly Borough

The Commission were updated on plans to create a Special Planning Document that would provide additional planning guidance to support child friendly development in Hackney. Once approved, the Child Friendly SPD will sit within the Local Plan to provide additional planning guidance to prospective developers to support child friendly planning proposals coming forward. The Commission understood that nationally, the Child Friendly SPD in Hackney would be the first of its kind and would further contribute to council wide initiatives to create child friendly neighbourhoods (school streets, play streets etc).

The Planning Policy Team have undertaken extensive work to support the Child Friendly SPD, which has been supported by the development of collaborative planning networks with local architects (ZCD), community groups (Hackney Quest) and young people's representative bodies (HYP and YFC). Such networks are important to informing best practice, and evidently putting Hackney at the forefront of developing child friendly infrastructure and development.

Although young people offer a unique insight into local neighbourhoods, the lived experience of young people both across and within communities and the way that they use local spaces can be very different. The Commission was pleased that this is acknowledged in proposals for Child Friendly SPD, where specific design principles may help to maximise spaces for multiple uses and users and break down physical barriers to parks and open spaces. Nonetheless, promoting inclusion is central to the councils' strategic approach and where possible this should be further reflected in guidance within the SPD.

Plans for the Child Friendly SPD are comprehensive which will not only provide case study examples of good practice, but also detailed guidance on design principles to inform planning proposals. The Commission were of the view that it would be helpful if further clarity could be provided on the vision for a Child Friendly borough and what this might look like, and more importantly be experienced by young people themselves. Further work to define those measures from which to the authority might assess the success of this new policy development is also needed.

Community involvement is key factor in the delivery of good planning outcomes as this can help to empower individuals and communities to play an active role in shaping the community in which they live. Local Planning Authorities (LPA) are statutorily required to develop a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) which provides a framework for how

the public and other community stakeholders will be engaged and involved the preparation of Local Development Plans and in commenting on local planning applications. Understanding that Hackney SCI is due to be updated, the Commission hope that young people will be involved alongside other consultees in this process, and that findings from YFC consultation and emerging principles from the Child Friendly SPD will be reflected in this update.

On the basis of the evidence presented, the Commission have made a number of recommendations (attached) which it hopes will guide and inform the council's approach to a Child Friendly Borough.

Once again, many thanks to you and to officers for supporting the work of the Commission.

Yours faithfully

Cllr Sophie Conway
Chair, Children and Young People
Scrutiny Commission

Cllr Margaret Gordon
Vice Chair, Children and Young People
Scrutiny Commission

Cc Polly Cziok, Director of Communications, Culture and Engagement
Natalie Broughton, Head of Planning Service

Recommendations

1. That the final report of the Young Futures Commission is presented to the CYP Scrutiny Commission together with an action plan which sets out how recommendations to improve engagement and involvement with young people will be embedded across the Council directorates. In addition, the Commission would welcome plans on how statutory partners can be supported to implement principles and practice of youth engagement
2. That the principles of engagement and involvement of children and young people highlighted in this correspondence, are used alongside emerging recommendations from YFC to inform consultation guidance across the council.
3. The Commission welcomes the development of Child Friendly Special Planning Document (SPD), and would recommend:
 - Further inclusion of the views of wider range of children and young people;
 - Greater clarity on the expected outcomes of the Child Friendly Borough SPD and how this may influence local infrastructure;
 - Further work to establish those criteria through to measure and monitor the success of this planning policy;

- Further detail on how young people themselves will understand this initiative, and the criteria through which they can assess local provision and success of this SPD (could there be a child friendly version of the SPD);
- That the final Child Friendly SPD is presented to Scrutiny.

4. The Commission would recommend that the planned consultation to update the Statement of Community Involvement incorporates:
 - The views of children, young people (and their parents);
 - The emerging findings of the Young Futures Commission;
 - The Draft report being considered by Skills Economy and Growth Commission before finalisation.