

<b>Paper Title:</b>	Improving Engagement and involvement of Children and Young People in Scrutiny
<b>Meeting:</b>	Scrutiny Panel
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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 As part of a broader ambition to further involve children and young people in local democracy, the new administration for 2022-2026 have made a policy commitment to:

*'...further promote youth participation in our democratic functions by inviting young people to attend each of the Scrutiny Commissions, to help make sure council decisions and services work for young people.'*

- 1.2 This paper sets out past and current arrangements for the engagement and involvement of children and young people within the overview and scrutiny function in Hackney. The paper also details a number of proposals through which to increase participation of children and young people in the work of scrutiny and contribute to improved decision making on those services which impact on them.

## 2. Engagement and Involvement of Children and Young people in Scrutiny

- 2.1 Engagement and involvement of children and young people by the overview and scrutiny function has been predominantly conducted through the Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission (CYPSC). Prior to 2020, this engagement took three main forms:

- Formal co-option of individual members of Hackney Youth Parliament on to the membership of the Commission;
- Ad-hoc consultations with various cohorts of children and young people (for work programme suggestions and for defined single issue items);
- Ad-hoc consultations with local parents and identified parents groups.

### Formal Co-option of Hackney Youth Parliament Members

- 2.2 Prior to 2020, the Hackney Constitution stipulated that up to 5 members of Hackney Youth Parliament (HYP) could become formal members of the CYPSC. Formal co-option meant that named HYP representatives would receive all papers and reports and (alongside other co-opted members) be able to attend and participate in

all meetings of the Commission. As with other non-statutory co-optees on CYPSC, HYP representatives were non-voting members.

2.3 Attendance of HYP representatives on to CYPSC can work well, particularly where the interests of young people and scrutiny coincide. There have been a number of recent examples where youth representatives have provided powerful and influential testimonies at meetings which have provided excellent insight and assisted the scrutiny process (e.g. the impact of lockdowns, housing support for care leavers, sexual harrassment in schools and ther readiness of schools to deliver new Relationship and Sex Education).

2.4 Formal co-option of individual HYP members does not offer a flexible means of engagement being restricted to named members and involvement centred around meeting attendance. Feedback from HYP representatives and their support workers noted that formal co-option of individual HYP presented a number of barriers to their participation in scrutiny:

(i) *Accessibility of meetings*: the timing of Council meetings which mostly commence at 19.00 made it difficult for HYP representatives to regularly attend given their homework and other after school activities. This was especially problematic when meetings were only held in-person which required representatives to be physically present in the Town Hall. In addition, as many meetings did not finish until 21.00 (or later), HYP representatives could not commit to attend the whole meeting given the lateness of their return home. As a result, HYP representatives attended periodically and not for the whole duration of the meeting (leaving around 8.00pm).

(ii) *Agendas do not always coincide with interests of young people*: whilst HYP representatives are regularly consulted in the development of the CYPSC work programme, not all topics selected for scrutiny at meetings were of interest to young people, which inhibited engagement at formal meetings. It should also be noted that whilst CYPSC consults HYP representatives primarily on children and young people's issues, their interests and personal manifestos (on which they are elected) naturally extend beyond this.

(iii) *Accessibility of reports*: HYP representatives noted that they also had difficulty accessing reports included within agenda packs as these were often long, detailed and assumed previous knowledge of the subject. This inhibited HYP from engaging with the subject matter and participation in discussions at the meetings.

#### *Ad-hoc consultations with young people and their parents*

2.5 CYPSC also engages and involves children and young people to support discrete items or projects featured in its work programme. Using established links with Hackney Youth Parliament, Hackney Education and Young Hackney, CYPSC has regularly engaged with specific cohorts of young people to further its understanding

and inform scrutiny of key policy issues. This has involved the administration of both focus groups and surveys by the Commission in its investigations for example:

- Outcomes of school exclusions;
- Housing Support for care leavers;
- Post 16 SEND provision.

2.5 Parents also remain a key informant for eliciting the views of children and young people, particularly in relation to younger children. The CYPSC has established links with Hackney Independent Parents Forum (HiP) and although they do not have formal representation on the Commission, are regularly consulted and involved in ad-hoc projects. Parent groups such as HiP and parents more generally have been consulted and involved

- Unregistered settings survey;
- Post 16 SEND provision;
- Outcomes of school exclusions;
- Recruitment and retention of in-house foster carers.

#### How are children and young people involved in scrutiny elsewhere?

2.6 In June 2021, the CYPSC conducted an audit of how children and young people were involved in scrutiny functions across 32 London boroughs. This audit provides [a summary](#) of the different arrangements through which children and young people were formally or otherwise engaged and involved in the work of scrutiny function.

2.7 To summarise the findings of this brief audit:

- Including Hackney, just 3 other London boroughs *formally* involve children and young people in their scrutiny function (i.e. are co-opted members).
- In the majority of scrutiny functions across London, children and young people's representative bodies (e.g Youth Parliaments / Youth Forums) are involved informally in that they are:
  - Attend and observe meetings;
  - Consulted on relevant agenda issues beforehand.

### **3. Recent developments in Engagement and Involvement of Children and Young People**

#### Changes to CYPSC Engagement

3.1 In light of engagement issues outlined above, CYPSC has made a number of improvements to the way that children and young people are involved in its scrutiny work.

(i) *Ending formal co-option of individual children and young people:* as of May 2021 the Hackney Constitution was amended to end named HYP representatives on CYPSC. This allowed HYP greater flexibility in the representatives that may wish to attend and engage with the Commission, that is representatives could be drawn from a wider pool of HYP members.

(ii) *Extending representation to the Care Council as well as HYP:* CYPSC membership has been extended to include members of Hackney of Tomorrow (Hackney Care Council) as well as HYP. Therefore up to 5 members of either Hackney of Tomorrow or HYP may formally attend and contribute at each meeting.

(ii) *Online involvement:* During the pandemic and lockdown scrutiny and other council meetings were moved on-line which helped to increase the participation of children and young people representatives. Although in-person meetings have now resumed, young people's representatives may still connect virtually to meetings.

(iv) *Report Summaries:* since 2020, the CYPSC has requested departments that all reports are accompanied by a short one page summary outlining key information contained in the report. This is to improve the accessibility of reports and ensure that key highlights from the report are noted by readers.

#### Local principles of for consulting children and young people

3.2 In a recent scrutiny exercise in which the CYPSC looked at proposals to develop a child friendly borough, the Commission consulted a number of local youth organisation representatives on the principles of good engagement and involvement of young people. Representatives from Young Futures, Hackney Youth Parliament and Account (HCVS) identified a number of common challenges in the way that they were consulted and involved by council services:

- Lack of coordination - too many asks by varying council bodies;
- Insufficient time allowed to prepare, to engage and meaningfully contribute;
- Lack of commitment to meaningful engage and develop understanding of young people;
- Failure to recognise the value of the time which young people gave to contribute.

3.3 Further to this work, the CYPSC developed a key set of principles to support the engagement of children and young people which should inform the way scrutiny and other council bodies consult with young people in their work. These were [formally submitted as recommendations](#) to the Cabinet member and [\(response here\)](#) and which included that where possible:

- Young people should be engaged and consulted in those settings in which they naturally congregate, feel safe and can communicate freely;
- Consultations should be flexible to reflect the differing degrees of involvement and time commitments that young people may have;
- Approaches to consultation should aim to further develop the knowledge, skills and understanding of young people;

- Whilst social media is an important tool for initial engagement, young people prefer face-to-face methods of consultation and preferably through peer to peer research;
- Young people should be compensated for their contribution to consultations in recognition of their time, expertise and insight (and in parity with other adult consultees);
- Parents should be involved in CYP consultations as they continue to play an important role in shaping the views of young people and remain a significant influence over the way that they engage with and utilise services.

*Changes to the structure of children and young people bodies*

3.4 There are three main children and young people consultative or engagement bodies in Hackney all of which have recently restructured the way in which they operate:

- Hackney Youth Parliament;
- Hackney of Tomorrow (Care Council);
- Hackney Young Futures Commission;

*Hackney Youth Parliament (HYP)*

3.5 HYP helps to represent the views of young people across the borough in local decision making. They aim to advocate on behalf of all their peers and contribute to positive change for all young people. They run campaigns about important issues to children and young people and hold regular events and consultations to support this role.

3.6 Prior to 2021, Hackney Youth Parliament was made up of 20 young people elected through a ballot conducted across all local schools. To extend and diversify membership, and to enable young people to be more flexibly involved in its work, Hackney Youth Parliament was restructured through:

- Election of 6 Cabinet leads, three of which will lead consultative forums;
- Consultative forums will consist of around 20 children and young people which will meet fortnightly and focus on agreed work programme:
  - Youth Opportunity Fund and Enterprise Fund;
  - Surveys and consultations;
  - Campaign work on issues that matter to young people, and react to current debate;
  - Attending LBH meetings with stakeholders to improve service delivery;
  - Provide support to local campaigns and debates that encourage youth voice.

3.7 The Chair and Vice Chair of CYPSC attended a consultative meeting of HYP in June 2022 to help identify areas for scrutiny in the 2022/23 work programme. This yielded 5 suggestions, three of which are to be included in the finalised work programme agreed by the Commission. All 6 Cabinet members of Hackney Youth Parliament

are notified of future meetings and the agenda items up for discussion, and are supported to attend by the Hackney Participation team (Young Hackney) and the Overview & Scrutiny Officer.

#### *Hackney of Tomorrow (Care Council)*

- 3.8 Hackney of Tomorrow is a representative and consultative body for all children looked after by the Council. This includes around 400 children aged under 18 years who are looked after by the Council (in foster care, or residential care) and a further 400 care leavers aged between 18 and 25 for whom the Council has continuing responsibility.
- 3.9 Hackney of Tomorrow operates 3 consultative sub-groups with looked after children and care leavers (Juniors aged 10-16 years; Seniors aged 17-21; Unaccompanied Young Asylum Seekers) all of which meet twice monthly. A key purpose of this consultative structure is to represent the views of looked after children and care leavers at Corporate Parenting Board, but members also participate in Ofsted inspections, Corporate Parenting consultations and scrutiny investigations.
- 3.10 Hackney of Tomorrow operates a Rewards and Recognition Policy to incentivise young people to engage and involve in its consultative and development work. The current rate is £10.20 per hour.

#### *Hackney Young Futures*

- 3.11 Hackney Young Futures (HYF) was a peer led consultative programme which engaged over 2,500 children and young people across Hackney. From this consultative work, [6 priorities](#) or 'asks' were developed to improve future service provision for children and young people:
- Secure (e.g improved housing options);
  - Healthy (e.g. access to mental health);
  - Active (e.g. access to sports and recreation);
  - Inclusive (e.g. acknowledged in regeneration);
  - Safe (e.g. reduced serious youth violence);
  - Bright (e.g improved opportunities for education, training and employment).
- 3.12 Policy and Strategic Delivery service lead HYF as it has moved from the consultation phase to delivering on the 'asks' and embedding the delivery and legacy. Eight young peoples 'Champions' positions have been created (6 of which have already been appointed) to help co-produce and support the delivery of the 'asks'. Specifically the role of Champions is to:
- Support implementation phase to ensure it is steered by young people;
  - Advise Services, helping them to ensure that the voices and viewpoints of young people are considered in their service planning and delivery;
  - Act as a link between Council services and other groups of young people across the borough (they have all been recruited from existing groups);

- Use the Young Futures communications channels effectively to reach young people and update them on the progress of the delivery of the asks and any opportunities to get involved

3.13 A Cabinet paper on the further development of HYF is expected in 2022/23.

*Hackney Local Offer*

3.14 A wide range of children and young people's services available to children and families is documented in a directory within the [Hackney Local Offer](#). This provides a resource for possible engagement and involvement of children and families across a wide range of services and issues.

#### **4. Extending scrutiny engagement with children and young people**

Key considerations

4.1 In agreeing to extend engagement with children and young people beyond CYPSC to the wider scrutiny function, it will be important to consider the following:

- (i) Formal co-option within scrutiny bodies does not offer an accessible way for children and young people to engage with scrutiny. Other more ad-hoc means of engagement may allow children and young people to engage with scrutiny more flexibly, and in a way which is more responsive to their needs and interests.
- (ii) Engagement and involvement with children and young people across scrutiny Commissions will need to be coordinated especially where this is focused on established Hackney liaison groups (e.g. Hackney Youth Parliament, Hackney of Tomorrow, Hackney Young Futures). This will ensure that requests are planned, prioritised and practical (not overburdensome).
- (iii) In considering the engagement of children in young people more broadly across the scrutiny function, the principles set out in 3.3 should be acknowledged, particularly the acknowledgement that young people's time is important, and that their contributions should be valued and compensated.
- (iv) The Overview & Scrutiny function does not have a dedicated consultation budget. Regular consultations with children and young people (or indeed other groups) will have budgetary implications.
- (v) Any agreed mechanism to extend engagement with children and young people across scrutiny should be sustainable and commensurate to the nature (i.e. member led) and scope of the scrutiny function.

## 5. Next steps for consideration by Scrutiny Panel

5.1 Options for extending involvement of children and young people across the scrutiny function in Hackney are given below for consideration and or approval:

- 1) That the scrutiny function collectively consults children and young people for work programme suggestions at the beginning of each scrutiny cycle, and is not just restricted to children and young people issues (e.g. education, children's social care etc);
- 2) That scrutiny Commissions should systematically assess how the views of children and young people may add value to those issues identified for scrutiny;
- 3) Where the views, experiences of children and young people are beneficial to scrutiny, this is undertaken through ad hoc consultation and engagement methods utilising existing consultative groups (Hackney Youth Parliament, Hackney of Tomorrow, Hackney Young Futures Commission) or other groups identified through the Hackney Local Offer<sup>1</sup> and coordinated through the Scrutiny Panel. The above will have budget implications and therefore, will require further discussions to explore budget options.
- 4) Scrutiny commissions ensure that any insight into the views of children and young people is systematically reviewed as part of broader reviews and council work programme planning (for example the Young Futures report, the reports from Hackney Youth Parliament and reports by voluntary sector organisations).

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<sup>1</sup> Commissions are also invited to review the Hackney Local Offer for local intelligence and information on service provision and possible identification of informants to scrutiny where these interests align.