

This Report will be made public on 19 February 2024.



Report Number **OS/23/09**

To: Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date: 27 February 2024
Status: Non key
Responsible Officer: Adrian Tofts, Strategy & Policy Manager
Cabinet Member: Councillor Mike Blakemore, Cabinet Member for Community and Collaboration

SUBJECT: 2023 FULL COUNCIL RESOLUTION - FOLKESTONE & HYTHE YOUTH DISTRICT COUNCIL

SUMMARY:

Full Council of 29 March 2023 resolved to refer to Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) a report on the benefit of establishing a Folkestone & Hythe Youth District Council, referencing the Kent Youth County Council. This report describes the youth councils and youth forum that are run by Kent County Council, Dartford Borough Council, Swale Borough Council and Thanet District Council to highlight to OSC the different approaches that could be taken to establishing a youth council and the likely resource implications.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. To receive and note report OS/23/09.
2. To note and comment on the different approaches to youth councils and youth forums set out in Section 2 of the report.
3. To note the key issues and resource implications outlined in Section 3 of the report.
4. To note the responses to the three parts of the 2023 resolution, outlined in Section 4 of the report, and provide recommendations as to the next steps.

1. BACKGROUND

1.1. The following resolution was raised at full Council on 29 March 2023:

“Council notes that Kent County Council operate a Kent Youth County Council. This operation is focused on only 3 issues per year. Other district, Town and Parish councils within Kent operate their own separate youth council scheme.

Council believes that:

The voices of young people are important when shaping decisions.

Having a forum for young people to form ideas, debate issues and influence council policy will lead to a more inclusive council environment.

Providing a platform for young people to engage in politics from an early age will only benefit the diversity of future political leadership for the district.

Council Resolves:

- To refer to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee a report on the benefit of establishing a district-based Folkestone and Hythe Youth District Council.*
- To invite the current representatives from the district on the KYCC, to offer their views on the establishment of a FHYDC.*
- To produce a short survey aimed at young people in the secondary schools in the district in order to determine the appetite of the district’s young people to have a formal structure to discuss and influence local decision-making policy.”*

1.2. Council agreed the resolution.

2. KENT YOUTH COUNCILS AND YOUTH FORUMS

2.1. The Lundy Model for Youth Participation, developed by Queen’s University, Belfast, provides a simple framework for considering how young people can participate in decision-making. The model sets out that: young people must be given safe spaces to develop and express their views (‘space’); they must be supported in expressing their views (‘voice’); they must be listened to (‘audience’); and, where appropriate, their views must be acted on (‘influence’) (see **Appendix 1**).

2.2. The following sections provide information on the Kent Youth County Council, Dartford Youth Council, Swale Youth Forum and Thanet Youth Council. The Strategy & Policy Manager met with the relevant officers from the four authorities to ask them about the schemes they facilitated, and this was followed up with additional questions by email. Other schemes in Kent were also explored to provide additional context.

Kent Youth County Council

- 2.3. Kent Youth County Council began in 1999 with youth representatives from the Kent districts and boroughs. The scheme was expanded in 2011 to include additional community members representing specific groups (black and minority ethnic, LGBT+, disabled, neurodiverse, Gypsy/Roma and traveller, international students, carers, home-educated, people in care, people not in education, training or employment and refugees).
- 2.4. Members of the Kent Youth County Council are elected by their peers. Young people between the ages of 11 and 18 are eligible to stand for election. Full members serve terms of two years and deputy members serve for one year. Only full members can be chair or vice-chair of the Youth County Council.
- 2.5. The Youth County Council aims for at least four members per district, and at least 12 community members across the county. There is a high turnover of members and so elections are held annually - this reflects the changing circumstances of young people between these ages, with youth county councillors stepping down to study for exams, take up further education or enter employment.
- 2.6. KCC's website lists 96 current youth county councillors (49 full members, 31 deputies and 16 community members). The website gives the first names of youth county councillors with a short statement about their areas of interest. There are four youth county councillors for Folkestone & Hythe district. (Folkestone & Hythe district representatives on the Youth County Council are listed in **Appendix 2** and the community members are listed in **Appendix 3**.)
- 2.7. Elections are held every year in November. Candidates are asked to provide a short manifesto statement outlining issues that they wish to campaign on. Candidate names and manifesto statements are included on ballot papers printed for school voting and published on KCC's website for online voting. Voters are asked to choose their representatives and which three campaigns members will work on during the year.
- 2.8. Kent's Youth Participation Team distribute ballots to schools, colleges and youth organisations across Kent and voting takes place over a period of two weeks. Candidates run their campaigns with the help of KCC's Youth Participation Team and the schools. For the community candidates, who may not have a local school constituency, KCC runs a virtual campaign with online voting, although overall the team finds that participation is greater with paper ballots cast in schools.
- 2.9. At the end of the voting period, KCC's Youth Participation Team collects the ballot boxes from the schools and tallies the votes, including votes cast online. In previous years around 21,000 votes have been cast in the election across 85 polling stations.
- 2.10. Newly elected members will then be trained in their roles by the team; the youth councillors are likely to be inexperienced at public speaking and may not have attended a formal meeting before, and many will only gain confidence towards the end of their terms.

- 2.11. The Kent Youth County Council meets regularly throughout the year to debate issues and work on campaigns. For 2024, the campaigns are: free school meals and tackling poverty; public transport; and mental health and wellbeing.
- 2.12. Ten meetings are held throughout the year at County Hall in Maidstone, on Saturdays between 10.00am and 3:30pm. In addition to the County Hall meetings, a training and campaigning residential weekend is planned for July 2024 and a summer holiday programme will begin in early August 2024.
- 2.13. Youth County Council meetings are not open to the public, and debates are not broadcast, but minutes are published. Around 50 to 80 members attend the monthly meetings, and around four officers from the Youth Participation Team may be needed to facilitate sessions, alongside some additional part-time support.
- 2.14. Youth county councillors will seek to bring about change by running campaigns in schools and colleges and creating campaign videos. County council officers can ask to attend meetings to seek views on policies and projects they are developing (for example, proposals for the Kent Local Transport Plan and policy around the sale and use of vapes and e-cigarettes).
- 2.15. Youth county councillors may address the county council's Cabinet, particularly when a new initiative is launched. Every year, seven members are elected to represent Kent at UK Youth Parliament (UKYP) events. There is a programme of UKYP events including an Annual Conference, and youth county councillors may visit the House of Commons to take part in youth debates.

Dartford Youth Council

- 2.16. Dartford Youth Council has been in operation for around eight years. Although supported by Dartford Borough Council, the youth council has a strong independent profile, with its own executive committee, [website](#), public relations officer and charity fundraising activities. Its website sets out its mission:

“We empower young people aged 18 and under to influence and inform the decisions that affect their lives. We support young people to get involved in our community, working alongside the Dartford Borough Council, making a difference as volunteers, campaigners, decision-makers and leaders.”
- 2.17. The youth council is facilitated by a Dartford Borough Council officer with the support of a local Kent County Council youth worker.
- 2.18. To be elected young people must be between the ages of 12 and 18 and attend a school, youth or sports group in the borough or live in Dartford. Every secondary school is entitled to send five members, selected by ballot, to serve on the youth council. Youth clubs and youth organisations are each entitled to send two members. Youth council elections are held every October in schools and youth groups. The youth council aims for between 20 and 30 members.

- 2.19. Membership is for one year, but members can stand for re-election in subsequent years; some executive committee members have served for several years. Dartford Youth Council members can also stand for the Kent Youth County Council or for the UK Youth Parliament.
- 2.20. The youth council meets in the chamber of the Dartford Civic Centre every month on a Friday between 4:30 and 6:00pm. At the start of the year the council elects an executive committee of seven members, comprising a chair, vice chair, secretary, treasurer, web administrator, public relations officer and events officer. The executive committee drives the youth council's activities.
- 2.21. Meetings are not open to the public and are not broadcast. Action points are noted for internal purposes, but minutes are not published.
- 2.22. Charity fundraising is a key area of focus for the youth council. The website lists other activities, including participation in the Kent Youth County Council, UK Youth Parliament, UK Young Mayors' Group and international youth groups, volunteering for the Dartford Festival, Remembrance Day events, rock climbing activities, cookery lessons and first aid training.

Swale Youth Forum

- 2.23. Swale Borough Council's youth forum has been running for around 30 years, having started in 1994. The lead officer at Swale is relatively new in her post and is preparing a survey of schools to gain feedback on how well the scheme is operating.
- 2.24. The youth forum is open to young people between the ages of 11 and 19. Members are not elected but volunteer for the role; the borough's secondary schools and Sheppey College are invited to send six students each, meaning that up to 42 members could take part. The officer has developed close relationships with the schools and college, and there is usually a good take-up of places. Recruitment takes place annually.
- 2.25. There are six youth forum meetings in an academic year and youth forum members are expected to attend all six meetings. Meetings take place in the Swale Council Chamber on Wednesdays from 9:30am to 12:30pm. The Mayor of Swale is invited and attends to greet the members. Swale borough councillors are also invited to attend to hear the views of the youth members.
- 2.26. The meeting is chaired by a representative from one of the schools. The chair is rotated to allow each school to lead a meeting and bring an issue to the group. Agendas for the meetings are written by the council officer in collaboration with the chair, considering issues highlighted at previous meetings.
- 2.27. The public cannot attend the youth forum and meetings are not broadcast, but minutes are published.
- 2.28. The youth forum can invite Swale Borough Council officers to attend the meeting. Officers have presented on topics including the local plan, town centre regeneration, community safety and climate change. External

speakers have also appeared, such as representatives from the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI).

- 2.29. The issues that the youth forum explores will change at each meeting. Recent issues have included: mental health signposting of local services; CV writing tips and advice on how to find jobs, career paths and interview skills; and safety concerns around active travel. However, there have been some longer-term projects, such as proposals for a new skatepark, which the youth forum has worked on for two years.

Thanet Youth Council

- 2.30. Thanet Youth Council is relatively new, having started in November 2022, and officers are still making adjustments to how the council is run. Thanet District Council has published [terms of reference](#) for the youth council on its website. The then Cabinet Member for Community Safety & Youth Engagement, Councillor George Kup, filmed a video to publicise the youth council, which can be viewed on the council's [website](#).
- 2.31. Thanet Youth Council is open to young people between the ages of 11 and 18. Candidates are not elected but are put forward by schools and youth organisations or volunteer themselves. The Thanet District Council officer said that the recruitment process involves significant work: calls are made through social media and through contacts in schools, air cadets, sea cadets, youth clubs, young offenders' groups and young carers' groups. Thanet considers that a more formal election process might deter some participants from standing, such as young people with learning difficulties, but candidates can stand for election in the Kent Youth Council if they wish, and some young people are members of both councils. Thanet's youth councillors serve for one year.
- 2.32. The terms of reference specify that there will be a maximum of 21 youth councillors. If more than 21 young people put themselves forward, those who made contact first would be given priority and others would be put on a waiting list for the following year.
- 2.33. Most youth councillors have not attended a formal meeting before and so Thanet's democratic services officers provide them with training and additional training opportunities are being organised. Thanet's website lists some of the opportunities the scheme offers youth councillors, including:
- Experience new things, make new friends and have fun.*
 - Access to partner agencies to up-skill your knowledge around current issues through the TYC meetings.*
 - Provide you with vital skills that will support you into adulthood."*
- 2.34. The Thanet District Council officer said that the youth councillors are gaining confidence, and the youth council now hosts lively debates. The youth councillors come from a range of backgrounds with a variety of experiences, and the officer finds that the youth council is open and accepts everyone. Over the last six months youth councillors have grown in their roles; some now accompany Thanet council officers to community meetings across the district to talk about issues affecting young people.

- 2.35. Youth council meetings are held every month in Thanet's council chamber and meeting rooms, between 6:00 and 8:00pm. Meetings alternate between Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays to give options for youth councillors who may have other commitments. Youth councillors must attend at least six meetings a year and they may be removed if they fail to attend three in a row.
- 2.36. Meetings are not open to the public and are not broadcast, but minutes are published. When the scheme began, officers had to lead the meetings, but the youth councillors are now starting to chair their own meetings and a chair is chosen from the group at the start of each meeting. Smaller sub-groups form to discuss priorities, and motions may then be taken back to the youth council for a formal vote. The chair has a casting vote in the event of a tied decision.
- 2.37. Members of Thanet Youth Council will identify issues that they wish to campaign on during the year. District council officers may ask to attend the youth council to seek comments on emerging work (such as proposals for the regeneration of Margate and Ramsgate following Thanet's successful Levelling Up Fund bid). The terms of reference state that the youth council may scrutinise any topic and ask officers, councillors and others to attend meetings. The youth council can act as a consultative body at the request of Cabinet and Council and make recommendations.
- 2.38. Members of the youth council are preparing to present to Thanet's Council for the first time. They will present a summary report of their work, and the terms of reference specify that this reporting will take place twice a year.
- 2.39. The youth council has a small budget that youth councillors can use to facilitate their work. Youth councillors are currently working with Thanet's communications team to develop branding for the youth council and are making a film about the scheme that will be hosted on Thanet's website.

3. SUMMARY AND KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 The four schemes outlined above vary in their approaches to membership, internal processes, areas of focus and interactions with the host local authority.
- 3.2 **Selection of young people** - The 2023 council resolution referenced the Kent Youth County Council. This is a more formal scheme with annual elections managed by the county council's Youth Participation Team. Dartford's Youth Council also holds elections for posts. Participants in Thanet and Swale's schemes are not elected but volunteer for the roles.
- 3.3 Although all the schemes have links to schools in their areas, most seek participation from a wider pool of young people to try to encourage more diverse representation. The Kent Youth County Council specifically seeks young people who are home educated and people who are not in education, training or employment. Thanet also seeks participants from a wide variety of youth organisations - such as cadets, youth clubs, young carers' groups

and young offenders' groups - whose members may not necessarily attend a secondary school in Thanet.

- 3.4 **Size** – Given its county-wide remit, the Kent Youth County Council is much larger than the district and borough youth councils with around 100 participants; the district/borough schemes have around 20 to 40 participants each, depending on the take-up in any year.
- 3.5 **Meetings** - The youth councils take different approaches to scheduling meetings, holding meetings during the working day, weekday evenings or at weekends to try to find the most convenient times for participants. Three of the schemes hold monthly meetings, while Swale holds six meetings a year. The schemes also run training and team-building activities outside formal meetings, with the Kent Youth County Council putting on residential activities over weekends in summer.
- 3.6 None of the meetings are open to the public and none are broadcast but, for most schemes, minutes or notes are taken and published on the hosting council's website.
- 3.7 **Project work** - In two schemes, Kent and Thanet, the programme of work is relatively structured over the year; in Swale issues are identified by members at the meeting; and in Dartford the work is driven by an executive committee of youth councillors, which provides some continuity over successive years.
- 3.8 Wider campaigns and issues feature in the work of all four; however, three (Kent, Swale and Thanet) also scrutinise the host authority's policies and projects, with council officers asking to speak at the youth council or youth councillors identifying which areas of the authority's work they wish to examine. The Dartford Youth Council seems more independent and less closely involved in the policies and projects of its host authority.
- 3.9 **Resources** – The council officers that the Strategy & Policy Manager met could not give a figure for the staff hours and additional resources that their schemes required, as the work was combined with other projects. However, those schemes in which youth councillors are elected (Kent and Dartford) are likely to require more resources; Kent County Council has a team to run the elections and Dartford has a borough council officer who works with a Kent youth worker.
- 3.10 Schemes where schools select young people to participate are likely to require fewer resources. That said, all the schemes need some dedicated staff resources from their hosting councils. This is because:
 - Recruitment must take place annually, as there is a continual turnover of participants, and this involves significant work in running elections or in promoting the scheme to schools, cadets, youth clubs, young carers' groups and young offenders' groups. One of the youth councils is currently trying to reinvigorate its membership with an authority-wide recruitment drive – previously, due to a fall in participation, rules were relaxed, and participants were encouraged to 'bring a friend', however, this led to a few well-resourced schools dominating the youth council, which deterred newcomers and reduced the diversity of the youth council.

- Most participants will not have taken part in formal meetings before, and many will not have spoken in public. New members must be trained in their roles and coached in public speaking (see Appendix 1, 'voice'). This process must be repeated for each new cohort. Several councils also arrange team-building activities and residential weekends outside the regular meeting cycle. Training and skills development are offered as key benefits to encourage young people to take part.
 - Officers must provide support throughout the year, including planning meetings, agreeing agendas, taking notes, updating website information and liaising with teachers, district or county Members, other council officers and outside speakers. Officers should also report back on how the views of the youth council have influenced the decision-makers (see Appendix 1, 'influence').
- 3.11 From the discussions that the Strategy & Policy Manager had with the officers, it is estimated that a resource of around a 0.5-1.0 full-time equivalent (FTE) post would be needed for the less-resource intensive schemes. The committee is asked to note the financial implications (paragraph 6.2 of this report): this would increase the current FTE and require funding. The cost of an additional full-time officer could be between £32.5k (bottom of D) - £43k (top of E) (based on 2023/24 salary scales including on costs), plus minimum budget for meeting facilities and materials.
- 3.12 For safeguarding reasons, additional support will be needed to facilitate workshops, training sessions and meetings where larger numbers of young people attend.
- 3.13 The schemes are generally supported by small budgets to provide catering, training opportunities and publicity materials, such as leaflets and videos. Thanet Youth Council has a dedicated budget that the youth councillors can spend on the priorities they identify.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND FULL COUNCIL RESOLUTION

- 4.1 A youth council can provide a new perspective to widen engagement and shape council projects and policies, while offering valuable learning opportunities and experiences for the young people themselves. [The Lundy Model of Youth Participation](#), developed at Queen's University, Belfast, provides examples of what youth participation can achieve.
- 4.2 However, it is essential to resource a youth council properly, given that young people will be giving up their free time to take part and will need to be trained and supported in their roles. While a youth council may focus on three or four key campaigns each year, there is considerable work that needs to be done behind the scenes to regularly recruit or elect youth councillors, train and support them in their roles and facilitate and report back on the meetings. There is currently no dedicated resource within Folkestone & Hythe District Council to deliver this, and so resources would have to be reallocated from elsewhere.
- 4.3 The full Council resolution of 29 March 2023 had three parts. These were that the council should:

- (i) Produce a report for consideration by Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the benefits of establishing a youth district council.
- (ii) Invite representatives from the Kent Youth County Council to talk to district councillors about the scheme.
- (iii) Organise a survey for Folkestone & Hythe's secondary schools to see if there is support to establish a youth council for the district.

Responses are given to each part below.

(i) Overview and Scrutiny Committee report

4.4 This report summarises four youth council schemes operating in Kent and some of the different approaches they take and the type of work they engage in. Overview and Scrutiny Committee is invited to consider the merits of the different approaches and the other points raised in this report.

(ii) Invite Kent Youth County Council representatives to talk to district councillors

4.5 Kent County Council's Youth Participation Coordinator said that she would be pleased to ask the youth county councillors representing Folkestone & Hythe district (see Appendix 2) if they would be willing to appear at a district council committee meeting to talk about their experiences of the Kent Youth County Council and their views on establishing a scheme for Folkestone & Hythe district.

(iii) Survey of secondary schools

4.6 It may be possible to arrange a survey of Folkestone & Hythe secondary schools through Kent County Council's Youth Participation Team, if the district council provides the necessary resources to support county council officers.

4.7 However, youth councils also look wider than secondary schools to increase the diversity of their membership; they may also include young people in work, college, those being schooled at home and young people not in any employment, education or training. A survey of a representative sample of households within the district could be carried out, as was undertaken for engagement on the Corporate Plan, to provide a more comprehensive picture of support for a youth district council and its possible format. Any survey would need to distinguish between the views of young people, teachers, parents, carers and others. Corporate Leadership Team has agreed a budget of up to £10,000 to be made available from the use of 2023/24 underspend for the purpose of conducting a survey.

5. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

5.1 A summary of the perceived risks follows:

Perceived risk	Seriousness	Likelihood	Preventative action
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That there is no widespread public support for a youth council among young people, parents or schools.	High	Medium	It is proposed that a survey is undertaken to gauge support within schools in the district, as well as support among other groups.
Young people cannot be recruited to a youth council.	High	Medium	Intensive engagement would need to be undertaken with schools, youth groups and others, to generate interest and encourage young people to participate in a scheme.
Interest cannot be sustained in a youth council.	High	Medium	Engagement would need to be undertaken annually to replace members who stand down at the end of their terms. Failure to do this could lead to one or two schools dominating the youth council.
Views of the youth council do not influence policy making, project development or the wider issues that the youth council seeks to influence.	High	Medium	District council officers, and participants from other invited organisations, would need to report back to the youth council on the changes that their views had brought about. Where views did not influence the outcome, the reasons for this would need to be explained to the youth council.
The youth council cannot be adequately supported and young people are unprepared for their youth council roles.	High	Medium	Staff and other supporting resources would need to be found from Folkestone & Hythe budgets to properly facilitate the work of the youth council.

6. LEGAL/FINANCIAL AND OTHER CONTROLS/POLICY MATTERS

6.1 Legal Officer's Comments (NM)

There are no legal implications arising directly from this report. However, if there is agreement for a Youth Council to be formed then changes may be needed to the constitution to reflect the ways that the Youth Council has input into issues facing the district or raises matters with Council bodies.

6.2 Finance Officer's Comments (RH)

It is noted within section 3 that additional resources and budget may be required. This would increase the current FTE and require funding. The cost of an additional full-time officer could be between £32.5k (bottom of D) - £43k (top of E) (based on 2023/24 salary scales including on costs), plus minimum budget for meeting facilities and materials.

6.3 Diversities and Equalities Implications (GE)

There are no equality and diversity implications directly arising from this report. The establishment of a Youth Council for Folkestone & Hythe, if approved, would ensure the widest possible membership from different protect characteristics to ensure the inclusivity of young people in understanding and participating in local democracy.

6.4 Climate Change Implications (AT)

There are no climate change implications arising directly from this report.

7. CONTACT OFFICERS AND BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Councillors with any questions arising out of this report should contact the following officer prior to the meeting:

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The following background documents have been relied upon in the preparation of this report:

Appendices:

Appendix 1: Lundy Model - diagram

Appendix 2: Kent Youth County Council – Folkestone & Hythe Members of KYCC

Appendix 3: Kent Youth County Council – Community Members of KYCC