

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET PANEL ON COMMUNITY

MEETING HELD IN THE VIRTUAL MEETING
ON THURSDAY, 30TH SEPTEMBER, 2021 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: Councillors: Judi Billing, Sam Collins, Ruth Brown, Sarah Dingley, Jean Green, Tony Hunter and Mandi Tandi

In Attendance: Steve Crowley (Service Director - Commercial), Claire Morgan (Community Engagement Team Leader), Danny Pearson (Assistant Community Engagement Officer), Anna Gouveia (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer) and James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer)

Also Present: At the commencement of the meeting approximately 9 members of the public, including registered speakers.

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 4 minutes 7 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Daniel Allen, Kay Tart and Ian Albert.

2 MINUTES - 19 JULY 2021

Audio Recording – 4 minutes 24 seconds

Councillor Sam Collins proposed, Councillor Judi Billing seconded, and it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet Panel held on 19 July 2021 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

3 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 5 minutes 21 seconds

- (1) The Chair welcomed those present at the meeting, especially those who had attended to give a presentation and the young people in attendance. He explained that the focus of the meeting would be how North Herts Council might better engage with young people.
- (2) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be audio recorded as well as filmed. The audio recording would be available on the Council's website and the film recording via the Council's YouTube channel;
- (3) The Chair drew attention to the item on the agenda front pages regarding Declarations of Interest and reminded Members that, in line with the Code of Conduct, any Declarations of Interest needed to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.

4 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 6 minutes 16 seconds

There was no other business notified.

5 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - HERTFORDSHIRE SERVICES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Audio recording – 6 minutes 20 seconds

Ms Laura Butcher, Youth Work Practice Manager, Hertfordshire Services for Young People, gave a PowerPoint presentation on services and support for young people in North Herts.

She drew attention to the following:

- Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) provided information, advice and careers guidance to young people;
- Resources were prioritised towards targeted prevention and early intervention work to support young people into a successful transition to adulthood;
- There were 10 access points in the County, one of which was in Letchworth;
- The Council had trained youth workers, personal advisors and employment training advisors working in the community, schools and colleges across the County;
- Projects and initiatives included the Youth Council, Wellbeing Project, Street Based Project, LGBT+ Group and Young Parents Group;
- Several other programmes were also delivered, some targeted at young people at risk of sexual and criminal exploitation, others to help young people into work and others supporting mental health;
- Youth engagement was done on a voluntary basis with an emphasis on listening to the young person's wishes and feelings;
- Projects were co-produced with young people and surveys and engagement activities were regularly undertaken;
- Youth Strategy Partnership Group meetings were held quarterly with key stakeholders to look at emerging needs and trends of issues affecting young people who were also invited to participate;
- North Herts Youth Council met once a week to discuss local issues and concerns and engage with the Youth Strategy Partnership Group;
- Current focus was on increasing Youth Council engagement with more diverse groups, increasing engagement on the Youth Strategy Partnership Action Plan, and looking at issues of body image and the impact of Covid-19 on young people's wellbeing.

Charlie, North Herts Youth Council Chair and Lucy, North Herts Youth Council Secretary, gave a presentation about what the Youth Council had been doing recently in regard to body image. They drew attention to the following:

- Their research in schools had found that Covid 19 had impacted young people's body image in a negative way, social media was another factor;
- Some young people felt that there was not enough support in schools for people who were struggling with body image;
- The Youth Council was compiling a report on their findings which would be shared with the Youth Strategy Partnership Group and other relevant bodies to seek further support;
- It would also write to schools about what support they already had in place for students needing help;
- It would make recommendations on how young people could be supported and look at practical changes which could be made in the local community, e.g. publicising local services, identifying gaps and promoting positive body image through a social media campaign.

The Community Engagement Team Leader congratulated the Youth Council on their work around body image which she agreed was a key issue and looked forward to reading the report.

The following Councillors commented and asked questions:

- Councillor Judi Billing;
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg;
- Councillor Sam Collins;
- Councillor Sarah Dingley;
- Councillor Tony Hunter;
- Councillor Mandi Tandi;

Comments included:

- In the past it had been difficult for the Council to engage with young people in a fun way;
- Councillors were keen to support young people in the community;
- Some time could be made on the Council agendas to hear from the Youth Council;
- It was useful to engage with primary schools, to engage children at the earliest opportunity. Youth democracy events had also been fun in the past, and it would be good to re-start all these initiatives post-pandemic.

In response to questions, Ms Butcher advised that:

- The prevention and early intervention work recognised that all young people could be vulnerable at any stage so work was focused on addressing issues before they escalated in areas such as mental health, exploitation or gangs;
- HCC looked to deliver projects which were engaging, fun and not too formal;
- Ways for the Council and Youth Council to work together could be explored;
- The CBT programme was designed to be interactive and engaging.

Young people in attendance made the following comments and suggestions:

- Regular contact with the Council would be useful as the Youth Council felt a bit detached;
- North Herts Council could use Instagram and Snapchat more as opposed to Twitter and Facebook;
- It would be good to hear why Councillors had chosen to go into local government;
- Regular reporting from the Youth Council to the Council would be of benefit, to let Councillors know what the Youth Council was discussing and get some feedback;
- There were about 5 members of the Youth Council currently and they would like to expand their membership;
- The Youth Council would go away and look into the parents' role in regard to body image;
- A buddy system or mentorship programme would be appreciated.

The Chair thanked Ms Butcher, Charlie and Lucy for their presentation.

6 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - IMAJICA THEATRE COMPANY

Audio recording – 35 minutes 6 seconds

Ms Sam Hough and Ms Kim Black, Imajica Theatre Company, gave a presentation on their organisation and its activities.

They drew attention to the following:

- Imajica was a community-based children's theatre company which also worked with young people and adults;
- They had a new digital project called 'My Voice - Will You Listen?', which would support young people aged 11-17 to create music videos using parodies of pop songs or making their own, using online methods to engage;
- The aim was to give young people a voice on the issues which affected them and support their wellbeing, connecting them with support in the community such as Councillors;
- It would be a four-month pilot project initially;
- Imajica also ran an 'Empowering Women' community project focusing on professional arts training and wellbeing, bringing women together. Covid had meant that the whole project had to be produced digitally. The project had been a success and was now being run for a second time 'in person'.

The Chair thanked Ms Hough and Ms Black for their presentation.

7 INFORMATION NOTE AND GROUP DISCUSSION

Audio recording – 43 minutes 10 seconds

The Chair led a discussion on how the Council might improve its engagement with young people.

The following Councillors asked questions and took part in debate:

- Councillor Sam Collins;
- Councillor Ruth Brown;
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg;
- Councillor Judi Billing.

Comments made included:

- The Council would like to help the Youth Council with recruiting more members, in particular boys who were currently under-represented on the Youth Council;
- Councillor Brown offered to meet with youth groups to talk about topics related to mental health and also re-start a mentoring scheme;
- It was suggested that the Executive Member for Community Development or the Leader of the Council could have a place on the Youth Strategy Partnership Group, or if this was not possible, could receive regular reports from them to keep communication lines open and facilitate working together;
- HCC could look at how to remove the stigma around attending youth groups being associated with needing support;
- Members of the Youth Council were welcome to speak to North Herts Council about how both groups could widen inclusivity and representation;
- Councillors would be going out into schools in October to engage with young people and talk about Local Democracy Week which had been taking place annually before the pandemic;
- Young people were invited to contact any of the Councillors present at the meeting on any matters – contact details were on the website in the 'Councillors' section.

Young people in attendance made the following points:

- Support networks and groups such as the Youth Council could be better promoted in schools and around community groups to reach a wider audience;

- There was a stereotype of young people going to youth groups needing help. Online meeting groups could be an alternative;
- Informal youth groups and spaces to use for these would be helpful;
- It would be great to have some boys in the Youth Council to get their perspectives;
- Boy's mental health was highlighted as an extremely important issue;
- School visits from the Council were important, and also showing young people that Council could be fun (not just sitting around talking);
- Word of mouth, newsletters, advertisements, social media and communicating to parents were also good ways of getting the message out to young people;
- A Youth Council Instagram page might be more enticing than using the existing North Herts Council one which was more for adults;
- Youth Democracy events could be better advertised to reach more young people.

In response to questions, Ms Butcher advised:

- Young people could be referred or self-referred into HCC's youth projects;
- HCC was open to ideas on how to better promote its services and projects such as the Youth Council;
- HCC engaged with other youth groups across the County and was keen to link up with more such as School Councils.

8 MEMBERS' DISCUSSION

Audio recording – 1 hour 10 minutes 41 seconds

Members had no further comments to make regarding how Council could improve its engagement with young people.

9 ACTIONS ARISING AND WORK PROGRAMME

Audio recording – 1 hour 11 minutes 4 seconds

The Community Engagement Team Leader commented that:

- a number of really useful comments and suggestions had been made and would be taken forward;
- a key point from the discussion was that the Council needed to improve its communication with schools and parents, to get information out to young people – North Herts could work with HCC on this.

RESOLVED: That the Community Engagement Team Leader be requested to update the Work Programme with the following action points arising from the evening's discussion:

- To consider ways that the North Herts Youth Council could be included in the Council's work e.g by inviting the members of the North Herts Youth Council to attend Full Council twice a year, and extending an invitation to attend Area Committee meetings should they wish;
- To request the Community Engagement Team to continue to look into developing contacts in schools to improve communication between North Herts Council and interested young people;
- To request the Community Engagement Team to look into promoting events such as the Youth Democracy event amongst a wider audience through, for example, school newsletters;
- To request the relevant Executive Member to work with the Communications Team to review the Council's current use of social media channels to ensure they are used to best effect.

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- To request the Community Engagement Team to look into whether North Herts Council could provide meeting spaces for informal youth groups.

Audio Recording of Meeting

The meeting closed at 8.46 pm

Chair