

Policy Briefing

Executive Debate on Helping Scotland's Youth Participate in Communities

Wednesday 1st May 2002 p.m.

Children in Scotland welcomes the continually increasing recognition, from both the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament, of involving children and young people in 'public' decision making.

This has been demonstrated by consultation with children and young people over key policy areas and the support of the Scottish Youth Parliament.

From this positive start, children and young people themselves have made recommendations to improve their involvement in 'public' decision-making:

Making consultation systematic and consistent in its approach

'It's good for young people to be asked.' Young Person aged 16

Are children and young people consulted on all issues affecting them?

- Certain children risk being excluded from consultation - young children, children and young people from black and minority ethnic groups and children and young people with disabilities
- Children and young people ask for someone whose primary responsibility is to ensure that their views are heard in policy and decision-making – someone like a Children and Young People's Commissioner available locally as well as nationally.

Making consultation meaningful

'I get bothered if I'm not included in discussions' Young Person aged 19

Are all groups – adults, children and young people – clear on the purpose of consulting children and young people ... and will the consultation have an impact on policy and decision-making?

- Children and young people report their frustration at being consulted but then not hearing the results of their consultation.

Putting identified issues on the policy agenda

'I don't see the point of having all adults' views and no children's views because you wouldn't see the differences between them' Young person aged 16

Once children and young people have been consulted, are their issues given sufficient priority on the policy agenda? Issues like those raised at the Cross Party Group on Children and Young People's Consultation with Young People on April 26th 2002:

- Policing that does not presume young people are the 'problem' and areas they feel safe
- Drugs and alcohol education that give them the 'facts' and from people who are experts and have actual experience
- Youth leisure facilities that they can afford, that they can reach by transport, that offer services they wish to have and that they feel welcome in

'Having your say' – Consultations with Children and Young People by the Cross Party Group on Children and Young People

The Cross Party Group has gone out to meet with groups of children and young people, across Scotland, to hear their priorities. The latest consultation was in Newton Mearns on Friday, 26th April 2002. Those consulted have remarkably common messages.

Young people need more facilities such as youth cafes. These facilities should involve young people from the start. The lack of facilities is related to problems with drugs/ alcohol, crime/ street safety and the lack of voice of young people. They feel drugs and alcohol would not be such a problem for young people if they had places to go. A place to go would also prevent young people from hanging around the streets, which could help to make the streets safer and reduce crime.

Young people are commonly told this is a local issue. **But, if there are national strategies for drug and alcohol misuse, for crime prevention and for children's services, why can there not be a national commitment to ensuring all young people have access to youth facilities that they can afford and that they want to go to?**

Children and young people have concerns about being safe on the street and frequently report feeling 'picked on' by the police. Children and young people feel frequently unsafe on the street, particularly at night. Some young people said that community policing had improved in their areas, with police getting to know local children and young people and more positive interaction. Other young people, however, had direct experience of being stopped by the police when they were doing no more than 'hanging about on the street'. They felt that police needed training on how to work with children and young people and that children and young people had the right to be on the street as much as adults. They too wanted to feel safe.

Drugs and alcohol misuse by children and young people. Young people approved of the move away from the 'just say no' approach towards the provision of information. Up-to-date information was not always easily available. Guidance teachers may not be the best people to educate young people about drugs and alcohol, despite their good intentions. Those with expertise and experience might be better – such as former addicts.

Young people's views need to be listened to and acted upon – a Youth Commissioner? Although young people are being consulted more through schools, youth fora / panels and consultation meetings, many of these do not result in any action being taken.

Some young people at Friday's event asked for a local Youth Commissioner, whose primary responsibility was to ensure that young people's views were heard in decision making. This matches the views of young people consulted by Children in Scotland, for the inquiry on a children's commissioner. Young people were supportive of a Children's Commissioner – 96% consulted – but, as one young person said, "*... they will only make a difference if they ask us what we want. If they don't ask us our views, there will be no difference*".

For the full 'Having our Say' reports from 1999-2001, see
<http://www.childreninscotland.org.uk/polcpg.htm#consultations>

These views are included in the *Children's Rights Audit 2000-2001*, funded by UNICEF and available from Children in Scotland. This publication reports on how well the Scottish Executive and Scottish Parliament met their objectives for children and young people over the parliamentary year.