



B&NES Youth Forum:

Rationale for transitioning away from the British Youth Council UK Youth Parliament model

Participation with young people update.

Introduction:

Since 2015 B&NES has had a contract with Off the Record (OTR) to deliver a service which supports Participation of Children and Young People.

There are two groups of Young People that OTR work with to deliver this work:

1. Children and Young People in Care, by giving a voice to Children Looked After (CLA) and Care Experienced young people by encouraging them, with the support of children's social care, to attend the In Care Council groups. This work is not the focus of this report and continues to be delivered very successfully, as was highlighted in the recent Ofsted report
2. The Youth Forum – The focus of this report
OTR had been a member of The British Youth Council (BYC) www.byc.org.uk. The BYC encourages Local Authorities to elect a local Member of Youth Parliament (MYP) and as the local provider of the Participation service OTR has successfully supported 5 young people in this role. However, the work involved in supporting that one individual is significant, time consuming and could be seen as not truly representative of the views of all young people in B&NES. OTR can still support the UKMP elections in B&NES and the national survey Make your Mark (MYM) <https://www.byc.org.uk/uk/uk-youth-parliament/make-your-mark> by promoting them through its networks.

During late 2021 OTR consulted with the Youth Forum and the B&NES Strategic Commissioning Officer and took the decision to review the role of the MYP. to withdraw from the British Youth Council (BYC) in early 2022. This decision was in part due to individual pressures experienced by the recent incumbents of the role of MYP and the impact of COVID. the decision was taken to review the role of MYP. It was felt that the BYC Youth Parliament model tends to centre around one elected MYP and not a wider group of young people.

NB *It is interesting to note that BYC acknowledge and respect that some do not have an MYP. BYC membership has declined from 214 member organisations in 2016, to 161 as of March 2021*

Key principles underpinning the Youth Forum's transition away from the BYC MYP model:

- The Youth Forum is committed to increasing and diversifying the number of young People engaging with the service.
- The Youth Forum will seek to ensure that the 'workload' is divided equally among participants where possible. – (Whilst empowering, the BYC model has tended to make the MYP and their deputy feel overwhelmed by the hours and labour involved at a time when they are usually in full-time education, employment, or training, this has then led to other Youth Forum members



not feeling there is enough for them to get involved with)

- OTR's additional staff capacity, created from no longer overseeing the MYP elections and MYM, will be used to increase and diversify the number of participants in the Youth Forum, and to maximise opportunities for their meaningful participation in local and national decisions that affect them.

Youth Forum participants' voices:

The transition has been youth-led from the start. The key theme that emerged as being important to participants was having a more inclusive, bigger Youth Forum that collaborates with other similar groups in B&NES. The group's feeling was consistently over time that this would be more possible by transitioning away from the BYC/UKYP. They fed back that they:

- Found MYM overly time-consuming, and the role of MYPs disappointingly un-inclusive and sometimes '*stressful*'
- Were very keen for more collaboration and want to meet other local participation groups in-person – '*Inclusivity is always welcome, & I would like to have more collaboration, as it can lead to us doing more useful & wanted projects.*'
- Would like to recruit more young people into the Youth Forum, especially '*unheard voices*' – '*I feel as if in the past youth forum has not been that accessible/inclusive [the MYP elections had attracted a somewhat narrow pool of participants - 'being inclusive is probably the most important thing.'*
- Would like '*A faster development of campaigns*'
- The purpose of the Youth Forum is to '*To bring a community of young people together to get voices and opinions heard*' and '*To help effect small scale change within the local community*'

Participation of young people in B&NES

In Oct 2021 there was a Youth Engagement Webinar hosted by Cllr Dine Romero, which focused on some initial discussion as to how to start engaging young people with the work of the Council. Following this OTR co-facilitated a *networking event with Bath Mind in Feb 2022 where young people from several organisations and groups showcased their work, and forged links with each other. A similar event is planned for Oct half term

*see Appendix 2

There is a newly formed Bath Student Parliament <https://www.schoolstogether.org/case-studies/bath-student-parliament/> where students from 12 Bath Secondary Schools meet on a termly basis with the aim of giving students a voice and agreeing to work together on common priorities.

There are variety of positive models that B&NES Council can use to engage with young people. There are the service user groups who are engaged with our commissioned providers, online surveys, and by hosting webinars.

*Appendix 3 is a 'Participation on a Page' overview of how we engage with our young people.



It should be noted that since January 2022 the Youth Forum has already begun to progress some new work:

- Three new regular participants have joined as of 20/5/22, all from at least one community that often experience marginalisation
- A youth-led process to decide on the group's first project of 2022: organising a B&NES Youth Pride event to combat isolation faced by many young LGBT+ people
- Growing peer facilitating in (and outside of) sessions
- Partnership being made with various other youth participation groups in the South-West, including a recent visit to Keynsham Now Youth Council to look at their model.
- Proactive discussions about attracting new participants and the sharing the benefits of taking part in the Youth Forum.
- Undertaking tangible, local, youth projects/campaigns that they can make progress on.

Next steps:

- Doing local campaigns/projects, starting with a B&NES Youth Pride Event (which will hopefully also help to engage new participants)
- Taking a youth-led approach to recruitment of more marginalised young people, informed by OTR's survey of young people on how best to do this.
- Seeking to build on and further collaborate with other B&NES and beyond youth participation groups, including Keynsham Now and Bath MIND.
- Supporting the development and expansion of Bath Student Parliament
- The Youth Forum are meeting (possibly along with representatives from other Bath youth groups) with Cllr's in July to discuss how they might be better involved with, and be able to influence, councils' processes and will have a tour of the Guildhall!!

For more information, please go to www.offtherecord-banes.co.uk/youth-forum, follow us on Instagram  [youthforumbanes](https://www.instagram.com/youthforumbanes) or email oweneverett@offtherecord-banes.co.uk