

## **STATEMENT FROM OFF THE RECORD YOUTH FORUM – 12<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2024**

The recent 'Make Your Mark' poll of over 500,000 11-18 year-olds (8% of the cohort), carried out by the British Youth Council (which has since had to shut down due to funding problems) found that many issues matter to young people in the UK, but their priority issue (with nearly 86,000 votes) is health & wellbeing. Their second priority is crime & safety (with nearly 79,000 votes). Only 112 young people in BANES took part in the poll (0.6% of the cohort): the priority issue for them was climate & environment, followed by jobs & economy.

We are representatives of the BANES Youth Forum. The Youth Forum is a group for anyone aged 11-18 (or up to 25 with additional needs) who lives, works or studies in BANES and who is passionate about getting young people's voices heard, and making positive change.

Our focus over the last year has been on our campaign to make mainstream schools in BANES more accessible to neurodivergent young people. We conducted peer research and wrote a report and toolkit based on our findings, which has been shared with all mainstream primary and secondary schools in BANES. Lots of schools have told us that they will try to incorporate recommendations that they aren't already doing.

Our current priorities (in no particular order), which reflect the priorities of our peers locally and nationally, are:

- Young people's mental health
- The climate emergency
- Getting more local young people engaged with politics and decision-making

We plan to work with BANES Council, the two BANES MPs and other local youth groups on these issues.

We are keen for BANES to re-join the UK Youth Parliament, so that our young people can be better represented on a national level. However, due to the uncertainty of the UK Youth Parliament's long-term future, limited funding, and our belief that we might have more impact locally, we have decided to focus on the local level for now. We're interested in setting up a local alternative to the UK Youth Parliament, and we'd love the Council's help with this.

So far we have met with BANES councillors, officers and affiliates to discuss: how the Council works, youth mental health provision and action on the climate & ecological emergency, and action on the cost of living. Our attendance at this evening's Cabinet meeting is also part of this process.

We would appreciate any assistance that the Cabinet can offer us on our three priority issues. Thank you.