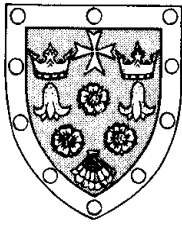


Ingatestone and Fryerning Parish Council



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Chairman: Cllr. L. Boyce

Parish Clerk: Elizabeth Durrant



What is a Youth Council and who benefits?

Not only do young people benefit from setting up a Youth Council but our Parish Council and the local community as a whole benefits.

Youth Councils enable Young People to;

- Voice their concerns
- Participate in local government
- Be empowered to take decisions and action to improve their local community.

Youth Councils enable Local Councils to;

- Truly represent the whole of the community they live in
- Become more vibrant, modern and dynamic
- Encourage young people to vote and become Councillors' when they are old enough
- Improve services to young people

Youth Councils enables the Local Community to;

- Become safer and more sustainable
- More vibrant and progressive
- Improve services and be more representative

Setting up a Youth Council

Having established why Youth Councils are so important. The following section gives some step-by-step advice to setting up, developing and maintaining a successful Youth Council within our Parish.

Representation and Membership

There is no set age range for Youth Councils. However, most encompass an age range of around 11-18 or 13-18 year-olds and these are both appropriate age ranges for local Youth Councils to adopt.

The 11-18 age range is very large and we may want to consider developing some sort of mentoring system between the older and younger members, or indeed

between the town Councillors' and the Youth Councillors', to ensure that everyone develops their roles and does not lose interest.

It is important to have an inclusive membership whilst retaining some structure. We may want to develop some core membership through schools, youth clubs etc while still allowing for young people to turn up and become involved in the Youth Council.

Ownership

It is essential that the young people themselves choose who they wish to be represented by (and not the Council or school teachers). It, therefore, may be useful to draw up nomination forms, along the lines used by the Parish Council and make them available to young people wishing to become Youth Councils (most likely through schools). It is then up to the people concerned to get themselves nominated by their peer group

Age and geographical considerations

It may be useful to aim for a certain number of Youth Councillors per age group and ensure that these are spread across the geographical area we represent, in order to ensure fair representation. If we are having an election we may want to have different colour nomination forms for different age groups in order to make any nomination process simpler.

Structure

Most Youth Councils mirror the local government structure. The most popular type of Youth Councils is based around current Parish Council structures.

We can have a formalized structure that may mirror our actual Parish Council structure or we may wish to adopt a more informal and flexible approach to meetings and communications etc. It is perhaps useful to consult the young people involved in what they would prefer their Council to look like before you impose a structure on them. However, a mixture of formal and informal may be the best way forward. It is important that there is some formal structure so that the youth council can feed into the general workings of the Council as a whole and is taken seriously as a component part of the local Council with some real power and influence. At the same time some informal workings with regard to communication and style of meetings may be more appropriate and will keep young people more interested, informed and engaged.

A Youth Council should work in a similar way to a Parish Council Committee and should be considered a valuable component part of the Council that is integrated into the formal decision making structure. Agendas and minutes should therefore be prepared by the Council's administration in consultation with the Chair person of the Youth Council or any other leading representative. An officer should be there to provide support, if requested and providing all decisions made by the Youth Council are legal and within budget there should be no reason for the Local Council to intervene.

All youth Councils, like any other Council meeting, should be open to the public and the minutes made publicly available. The minutes may contain recommendations and proposals that will need to be given due consideration, otherwise there is little

point in having a Youth Council at all. It is also useful if Councillors take an interest in the Youth Council and therefore ensure that there is a two way contact between the Youth Council and the actual Council (but without being too intrusive)

Meetings

It is important that there are enough meetings to ensure that decisions are agreed and the Youth Council is active but at the same time there should not be so many meetings that people lose interest and focus. Many types of Council meet once every two weeks or once every month. It is useful to have each meeting on the same day and at the same time so that people do not become confused or forget.

If our Youth Council decides to meet monthly to make decisions it would be useful to have some kind of communications means for the Youth Council between meetings (possibly via a web-based group). It may also be useful to have the meetings in a more informal setting, if appropriate, such as a youth centre, where the maximum number of young people will be encouraged to attend.

A Youth Council Constitution

As with any organization, it is essential that there is a clear aim and focus in order for the Youth Council to be successful. Therefore, we may find it useful to set out some terms of reference, set of mission statements or Youth Council constitution. This will enable the Youth Council to work efficiently and achieve real results. The constitution can be similar to that of the actual Parish Council. By giving the Youth Council a real set of structures it will enable them to act as a properly functioning organization with real power and responsibility over its own affairs.

A youth council constitution should include;

- A mission statement and set of aims
- The Youth Council structure
- Members of the Council (including the executive committee or any other committees and their roles)
- How the Youth Council will operate (including how often it will meet etc)

Empowering Young People through Youth Councils

Give Real Power to Young People

It is important that our Youth Council is not just a talking shop but gives real power and responsibility to the young people involved.

Financial Responsibility

It is important to set aside a budget for youth related issues (after all they do make up nearly one quarter of the population) and make sure that the Youth Councillors' have a real input into how that money is spent.

Giving a Youth Council its own bank account and cheque book can make young people feel truly autonomous, even though the Parish Council will need to keep at least one signature on the Youth Council cheque book, ensuring that financial commitments are made only through consultation with the Parish Council.

Funding Opportunities

There are also funding opportunities for Youth Councils that we may want to encourage our Youth Council to tap into. It is important that Councillors' offer the Youth Councils other ideas (such as approaching business etc) and encourage their innovation.

Innovation

Young people may also have innovative ideas on how other services can be provided in the Council that may not be seen to be specifically youth related, for example, the environment. You may also find that members of the Youth Council have hidden talents - such as IT, web-designing, photographic or journalistic skills, that may be of use to our Council.

It has been known for Councils to employ members of the Youth Council to develop their web-sites for a small cost or write articles in their local newsletters. This helps both the Council to develop innovative ideas and deliver more and the young people to gain valuable experience.

Youth Council Successes

We have already established that it is important that young people have some real power and responsibility (preferably with a ring-fenced budget). But, what kind of things might a Youth Council be interested in and what can it realistically achieve? Well that depends on the Youth Council and the facilities it already has available to them. Most young people say that there is not enough to do in their local communities. Developing a Youth Council can ensure that there are more facilities for young people and, more importantly that those facilities are tailored towards the needs of young people because they are set up by young people themselves. In addition, it creates a system of ownership and respect among the young people and ensures that the service is developed and sustained.

There are many issues that effect young people that the Council may currently not even consider;

Transport - Young people (particularly in rural areas) often feel trapped through lack of transport to neighbouring towns/villages. A Youth Council could put pressure on local bus companies to change or provide more routes in order to meet young people's needs and enable them to gain access to vital services in other nearby areas.

Local Facilities - In addition to access to existing facilities young people may want to create a graffiti wall, skate park (which we already have), snooker hall or just a safe place to meet and hang out. Youth Councils are often able to apply for certain grants to fund these facilities. They also represent their peer groups' views and find suitable sites for various activities.

Youth Club/Drop in Centre - Much of the time young people just want a safe place to hang out with friends and socialize. They may also want somewhere to go to for advice and help. Youth Councils are in a position to put together a plan detailing young people's needs and can apply for grants to achieve them

Working for the Community - Young people are conscious of the communities in which they live and want to improve the environment. They are often interested in conservation work, preventing vandalism, recycling projects and promoting the place in which they live

Example: Malpas Young Persons Parish Council (MYPPC) in Cheshire won the Home Secretary's Award for Young People in the Norwich Union Neighbourhood Watch Awards 2000. The Youth Council found that young people usually got the blame for vandalism within the village. To combat this they identified the main targets for vandalism and undertook a programme of repair and repainting. When the vandals struck once more they repainted again. The vandals soon got the message that their actions were unacceptable and graffiti in the village has now been reduced to a negligible level. The Youth Council also raised the problem of road safety in the village.

In particular they questioned why a lane that ran directly between the High School and a Council housing estate was subjected to restrictions on use that prohibited cyclists from using it. The Youth Council met with the Highways Department and agreed with them a change of use that now allows cyclists to cycle to school away from the busy High Street, reducing considerably the potential for road traffic accidents. In addition to the Young Persons Award, MYPPC have also won a cheque for £1,000 to be spent on their community work.

Youth Council's often have an idea of what they are generally looking to achieve but it might be useful for the Parish Council to give the Youth Council an initial project for them to get stuck into. This can often focus the Youth Council in its early days and prevent loss of loose discussion. It will also make the Youth Council feel that it is worthwhile. One idea might be to conduct a youth survey to see what young people want in the town and set some key tasks and objectives for the youth council.

Maintaining and Developing Successful Youth Councils

Essentially, if the Youth Council achieves real results and leads to change in their local community it is more likely to keep its core membership base.

Here is some advice from Beverley Town Council and their very successful Youth Council:

- Do be prepared to commit financially
- Do provide support and advice when needed
- Don't try to dominate and be overbearing
- Do give them enough freedom
- Don't overwhelm them
