

How to...

Involve young people in your ward activities

This 'how-to guide' is intended to set out the many ways in which young people contribute to civil society in the Royal Borough and to provide practical advice to councillors and those involved in City Living, Local Life to support and encourage youth participation.

Background

The Royal Borough has a strong reputation nationally for its commitment and approach to youth participation and has been awarded the highest level of standard under the 'Hear by Right' quality framework. The Council has also received a 'Big Society' award by the Prime Minister for its efforts to engage children. However, there are still opportunities to utilise the skills, experiences and interest of young people to contribute to borough-wide initiatives such as City Living, Local Life or the work of residents' and tenants' associations.

Why is youth participation important?

Listening to young people and representing their interests strengthens local democracy. It allows them to feel respected and valued as active citizens in a shared community. Children and young people are twice as likely to access local services in comparison to other residents and so it is important to involve them in shaping the services that they use. Young people also bring an expertise, enthusiasm, energy and unique perspective to tackling local issues, especially issues that directly affect them.



Youth participation helps to create a sense of responsibility and promotes greater civic pride and enhances the community as a whole. It can help to develop young people's confidence, public speaking skills and ability to use their own initiative.

How are young people currently participating in the Royal Borough?

The Youth Forum	The Youth Forum provides opportunities for young people in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea to debate, inform and actively participate in the development and improvement of services for young people. This forum is supported by the borough's Youth Participation Team. Examples of projects carried out by the Youth Forum include:
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leading on a community consultation project in Holland ward on anti-social behaviour, in partnership with the Safer Neighbourhood Team and social landlords. • Working with the Metropolitan Police on youth consultations around stop and search. • Supporting councillors in North Kensington to consult with young people on proposals for the new academy and leisure centre. • Carrying out research into what young people want from their Council and the services it provides.
The Children's Forum	<p>The Children's Forum provides opportunities for children to meet and share their opinions. It is open to children aged 8 to 13 that live or go to school in Kensington and Chelsea. Members have the chance to make decisions about how the Council can support children in the Royal Borough.</p> <p>Examples of work carried out by the Children's Forum include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing a group of children to clear up the waste on the Canal towpath. • Working with Chelsea and Westminster Hospital to redesign the children's ward. • Providing training to peers on anti-bullying at schools in Kensington and Chelsea.
Youth Parliament	<p>The United Kingdom Youth Parliament (UKYP) is an organisation that offers young people the opportunity to express their views and opinions. The UK Youth Parliament gets involved in a range of activities, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carrying out research into what young people want from their Council. • Debates about local, national and global youth, democracy and citizenship issues. • Organising local events. • Developing publicity to promote events and services for local young people. • Going on residential trips and international youth exchanges. • Attending conferences and events, including supporting the 2012 bid. • Being part of the interview panels for employing staff. <p>Elections for the RBKC Youth Parliament are carried out through the Youth Forum.</p>
Action Disability Youth Project	<p>The Youth Project provides opportunities for young disabled people to actively participate in the development and improvement of services for young people with disabilities across the borough. Any young disabled person aged between 13 and 25, who lives or studies in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea can get involved. The Project has been involved in a range of activities including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asking young people with disabilities what they want from their Council • Finding opportunities for more disabled young people to have a voice • Promoting the project • Carrying out mystery shopping trips to test local services • Advising on access issues and identifying ways to improve things
Mystery Shoppers	<p>The Youth Participation Team also run a 'Mystery Shopping' programme through the Youth Forum which provides the opportunity for young people to market-test services that are provided for them and identify ways of shaping them to suit their needs.</p>

‘Top tips’ for engaging and involving young people

1. Treat young people as equals and allow equal partnership between adults and young people. Remember that children and young people are citizens too, who have the right to be involved in all aspects of community life.
2. Always be honest and clear with young people, setting out what you intend to do with their suggestions, how this can improve services and explaining why it may not be possible to act upon their suggestions.
3. Avoid tokenistic engagement with children and young people, especially when a decision has already been made.
4. Avoid patronising young people and using language that they will not understand, leading to them feeling uninvolved or disinterested.
5. Ensure that your activities are accessible to all children and young people and that every effort is made to overcome barriers that prevent the participation of individuals and/or groups
6. Allow hours of engagement that suit young people’s patterns.
7. Establish clear feedback mechanisms, explaining how and when you will feedback
8. Promote a sense of pride for their contribution and recognise participation with reward, such as an accreditation.



How can you utilise youth participation in your ward?

Trained ward ambassadors	Both the Youth and Children’s Forums can assign a trained ambassador to each ward to support elected members and residents to identify the issues that matter to children and young people, encourage volunteering, and help to promote a greater sense of civic pride.
Opportunities to shadow councillors	Providing opportunities for young people to shadow councillors helps to create an understanding of what the Council does and promotes civic involvement. Shadowing may include providing the opportunities for young people to sit in on surgeries, meetings with local organisations, council meetings or City Living, Local Life event and project work.
Involve groups of young people in community projects	There is an excellent network of representative groups in RBKC that are contactable via officers within youth services. Existing groups include school councils and youth and children’s groups. These groups can be contacted to promote involvement opportunities or to consult and engage with.
Utilise digital engagement	<p>The majority of young people are using online networks to participate and communicate, with a number of online fora setup specifically for young people. Utilising these mediums to communicate, engage and consult with young people can encourage participation and help councillors to shape policies and projects.</p> <p>City Living, Local Life has also developed a suite of digital engagement tools to engage with local residents and these can be used to promote opportunities for young people. There is a website, blog, twitter and e-bulletin that can be used to engage and communicate with young people.</p>

Walkabouts	A number of councillors already carry out walkabouts with local residents, PCSOs or their City Living, Local Life support officer. This opportunity could be provided specifically for younger people to point out areas that they spend time in, feel unsafe in or would like to see improvements. Hearing firsthand the perceptions of a young person is far more valuable than hearing the opinions of even the most knowledgeable professional and this can be particularly useful with issues surrounding community safety.
Encouraging political engagement	<p>There are a number of ways to encourage young people to think about politics by mirroring the structures in place on a local and national level. Holding 'young mayor elections' by mimicking the London Mayoral elections would educate young people how voting works. This could even be done on a ward basis, creating a sense of ownership of their local area.</p> <p>In addition to this, an even simpler option is to organise a young people's scrutiny group that would look at local issues. This could be done in a group of wards or at a very local level.</p>
Art Projects	Art is an excellent medium for expression and so projects that encourage young people to be creative, potentially even focusing on their local area and environment can help to garner views and create a sense of belonging. This can be taken a step further by offering opportunities to decorate a community space near to where they socialise, with a mosaic or paint to express their view of the community that they live in.
Ward Meetings	Ward meetings may be open to all residents in the Royal Borough, however they do not always seem accessible to young people. Extending the invitation to specifically invite young people to ward-wide meetings will increase the chance of them participating and may offer an alternative view in discussions about local issues.
Improving the local environment	A number of schools across the country already do regular 'litter-picks' as part of their pastoral education to encourage awareness of environmental issues and to promote a sense of community ownership. Providing equipment and supervision for young people to volunteer and do this helps them to take pride in their local streets.
Community space and ownership	Involve young people in projects to help design or rejuvenate new parks, play areas and youth clubs. Like all residents, young people feel a sense of ownership over the spaces that they socialise in and this can be further embedded by providing opportunities to shape how these spaces are used.
Promote existing opportunities	There are a number of existing national initiatives that schools, youth groups and young people can get involved in. This can include anything from the Jack Petchy award scheme which encourages young people to get involved in constructive activities for the community to government services like the National Citizen Service.

"We'd like to be considered as RBKC citizens rather than just as young people, as that way we can be more involved in everything and not just things that are only to do with young people."

Youth Forum member

How do I find out more information?

This guide contains just a few ways to increase youth participation in your ward, but there are still a number of other ways to engage and involve young people. If you have a particular idea that you would like included in this guide, or would like to turn into a project in your ward, please contact either your support officer or one of the officers below:

- **Community Engagement Team**
Community.engagement@rbkc.gov.uk
020 7361 4633
www.citylivinglocallife.org
- **EPIC CIC**
Annick Batimba, Youth Participation Coordinator
Annick.batimba@rbkc.gov.uk
020 7938 8022
- **The Children's Forum**
0207 938 8071
- **The Youth Forum**
0207 938 8022
- **Action Disability Youth Project**
0207 938 8022

Other useful sources of information

- **The National Council for Voluntary Youth Services**
The NCVYS is a network of over 280 national organisations and regional and local networks that work with and for young people.
www.ncvys.org.uk
- **The British Youth Council**
The BYC support young people to get involved in their communities and democracy locally, nationally and internationally as volunteers, campaigners, decision-makers and leaders.
www.byc.org.uk
- **National Citizen Service**
NCS brings together young people from different backgrounds to encourage personal and social development by working on skills like leadership, teamwork and communication.
www.gov.uk/government/get-involved/take-part/national-citizen-service
- **The centre for public scrutiny**
The Centre for Public Scrutiny is a charity whose principal focus is on scrutiny, accountability and good governance, both in the public sector and amongst those people and organisations who deliver publicly-funded services. The link below is to a guide for overview and scrutiny committees about involving young people in scrutiny.
www.cfps.org.uk/domains/cfps.org.uk/local/media/uploads/youngpeopleguide2final.pdf
- **Know How Non Profit**
KnowHow is a community of non-profit organisations sharing questions and experiences. Below is a guide they've produced on how to engage with young people in your community.
www.knowhownonprofit.org/how-to/how-to-engage-with-young-people-in-your-community

- **Involve**

INVOLVE is a national advisory group that supports greater public involvement in NHS, public health and social care research. They share knowledge and learning on public involvement in research. Their 'Not Another Consultation' report explains how you can make community engagement informal and fun.

www.involve.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Not-Another-Consultation.pdf



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