

Cabinet – 12 September 2023

UPDATE ON YOUTH LED DEMOCRACY

Name of Cabinet Member	Councillor Jane Carr Cabinet member for Social Inequality
Report sponsor	Sharon Bridglalsingh Director for Law and Governance
Report author	Peter Taylor Electoral Services Manager Peter Taylor

Exempt / confidential / not for publication	No
Council Plan reference	Not in Council Plan
Wards affected	All wards

Executive summary

This report seeks to update Cabinet on the progress with the Council’s Youth Led Democracy project, since the transition to Democratic Services in the second half of 2022. The transition of the service followed a [Full Council motion in January 2022](#), asking officers to expedite the return to school elections and to consider the introduction of a Youth Mayor and Councillor Youth Democracy Champion.

In September 2022 Councillor Mahendran was appointed as the Council’s Youth Democracy Champion, in February 2023 elections took place across all secondary schools with turnout in excess of 90%, whilst in June 2023 the Council’s first Youth Mayor (Chloe D’Souza) was elected.

1. Proposed decisions

- 1.1 That the progress, work and outcomes set out in sections 3 and 4, be noted.
- 1.2 That Cabinet offer any feedback or recommendations on the next steps set out in section 5 of the report.

2. Background

2.1 Further to the transfer of Youth Led Democracy, into Democratic Services in autumn 2022, informal consultation was undertaken with a range of stakeholders:

- Key Councillors, including the Leaders of all Political Groups, affected Cabinet Members and previous Youth Council members.
- Officers, including the Chief Executive and Director of Children’s Services.
- Young people who were members of the previous body (MK YCAB - Milton Keynes Youth Cabinet).

- 2.2 Officers also made contact with colleagues from other authorities with established elected Youth Councils, Youth Mayors or similar, to understand good practice and challenges from elsewhere.
- 2.3 All those consulted were broadly positive about the work of MKYCAB over a number of years, but reflected on a number of opportunities for improvement. For example, there was a feeling that MK YCAB could be a more genuinely representative of young people in Milton Keynes. For a number of reasons (principally Covid-19) there had been no actual elections to MK YCAB since 2019.
- 2.4 MKCC Councillors in particular, felt there was a disconnect between MK YCAB and decision makers at MKCC. Whilst YCAB members attended Children and Young Peoples Scrutiny Committee, an opportunity was being missed for MKCC to understand the views of young people in the city, in decision making.
- 2.5 Existing YCAB members felt very strongly that resources to support campaign groups should be maintained and the value and contribution of YCAB campaigns over the years should continue to be recognised and supported.
- 2.6 Other opportunities identified during informal consultation were:
 - a) securing representation from particular groups including those resident in Milton Keynes but attending school outside of the city, home schooled young people, and those with SEND requirements; and
 - b) providing opportunities for young people to learn skills that would form a pathway to serving as elected representatives of the future, via a body which broadly mirrored the governance arrangements at MKCC.
- 2.7 Officers therefore identified a number of objectives for 2023:
 - a) Refreshed structure and renamed body in place from Spring 2023
 - b) Delivery of school elections in February 2023
 - c) Introduction of a Youth Mayor from Summer 2023
 - d) Revised meeting arrangements from Autumn 2023
- 2.8 Since the transition of youth led democracy into Democratic Services, colleagues in Children's Services have continued to play an important role, supporting, advising, collaborating and providing resources in key areas.

3. Progress against objectives

Refreshed and revised structure

- 3.1 Further to consultation a number of changes were agreed, including the renaming of MK YCAB to MK Youth Council. Additionally, an 'Advisory Group' comprising a core of Youth Councillors (Youth Mayor, Deputy Youth Mayor, Youth Council Chair, Campaign Group Leads [x2] and Members of Youth Parliament) was agreed with the intention of working analogously to the Council's executive. With time it is hoped a closer working relationship will develop between the Advisory Group and Cabinet / CLT.
- 3.2 Full details of the structural changes agreed are set out in detail, in **Annex A**.

School elections

- 3.3 Based on the school population each secondary school was allocated a number of places on the new Youth Council. Schools were provided with basic resources to support the nominations process and all schools engaged positively, with some embracing the opportunity to explore democracy by holding hustings or other activities. Of the 17 secondary school sites in Milton Keynes, 13 had contested elections and required a poll whilst in total 160 young people put themselves forward for election.
- 3.4 Secondary head teachers supported the idea of running elections as closely as possible to ordinary elections and referenda, so dates were agreed for polling at individual schools (a week had been allocated for polling and declaring the results) and ballot papers printed by colleagues in MKCC print.
- 3.5 The broader democratic services team supported the administration of polls on site (alongside designated school staff), and the subsequent count, which required most of the service and took in excess of 8 hours (most of the elections were multi member vacancies which require more labour-intensive counting methodology).
- 3.6 Results were announced on Friday 10 February and published on the Council's website. Since then, Youth Councillors have been inducted and supported in a range of ways:
 - a) A funded 3-day residential induction trip to Green Park Inspiring Learning Centre, at the end of March to team build, understand how the Youth Council operates, and agree initial roles.
 - b) Workshops led by senior officers including Mac Heath, Michael Bracey, Marie Denny and Sharon Bridglalsingh. Sessions have included; influencing decision makers, public speaking, and personal resilience.

Youth Mayor

- 3.7 A number of options were explored in relation to Youth Mayor elections, including the option of a directly elected position. Based on the feedback from other Councils who operate this model, and the resources and time constraints, it was decided not to pursue this option in time for February elections.
- 3.8 Alternatively, a framework was agreed for the Youth Mayor to be elected from the membership of Youth Council. In June, a special meeting was held to hear speeches from those nominated and Youth Councillors voted using a supplementary voting method, to ensure that the winner would have a strong mandate.
- 3.9 Chloe D'Souza was elected from the Youth Council as Milton Keynes' first Youth Mayor, whilst Maggie Beckett is Deputy. The Youth Mayor is currently working with the Advisory Group and officers to identify her priorities.
- 3.10 To support the role, a chain of office has been procured and our webpages have been updated to include the Youth Mayor's bio and an option to invite the Youth Mayor to events. This link is also on the Mayor of Milton Keynes web page.

- 3.11 The Youth Mayor has been busy in her first 3 months in role, speaking at Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Committee and attended events such as Bletchley Carnival and ‘Zine’ magazine launch in the central MK library.

Revised meeting arrangements

- 3.12 Whilst the Youth Council will continue to meet monthly at Civic, officers have worked closely with the Chair to develop a new agenda style, which will be prepared and published in a similar way to other MKCC meetings. The September meeting agenda is published on modern.gov.
- 3.13 Agenda items are a blend of traditional topics and new items such as a monthly debate, consultation responses and a look at forthcoming MKCC executive decisions and meetings.
- 3.14 Meetings will run in a similar way to committee meetings and be supported by Democratic Services, with summary minutes produced.

4. Other updates

- 4.1 Councillors J Carr and Mahendran continue to have regular briefings with lead officers for youth led democracy (Peter Taylor [Electoral Services Manager] and Lisa Thompson [Democratic Participation Officer]) guiding their work from a member perspective and exploring relevant opportunities.
- 4.2 In February, Youth Councillors attended YouthCon in London. Organised by the British Youth Council, it was a day of discussions, guests, workshops and campaigns supporting #YouthVoice and a positive social impact. During July, Members of Youth Parliament attended the UK MYP annual conference held at the University of Leeds.
- 4.3 In July, Youth Councillors helped to deliver a conference to commemorate 250 years of amazing grace in conjunction with Cowper and Newton Museum in Olney. Students from 7 schools were in attendance at an informative and powerful event.
- 4.4 Youth Councillors have also been part of consultations for projects such as the Good City and Central Milton Keynes Market Space, but the demand for views or representation from the Youth Council has grown and this will need to be managed carefully moving forward.

5. Next steps

- 5.1 Work for the remainder of 2023 will focus on continuing to support the Youth Council and Youth Mayor to embed, develop and work effectively. The Youth Democracy Champion and Cabinet member are keen to maintain momentum and make good use of the discretionary budget allocated to Councillor Champions in this area.
- 5.2 Moving forward, planned work includes:
- a) Exploring more organised and proactive two-way communication channels between the Youth Council and the Mayor, Cabinet, Youth Democracy Champion and CLT, to enable the Youth Council to understand and influence in areas where they have an interest.

- b) A review of the arrangements, resourcing and funding for Youth Council campaigns in the run up to the next British Youth Council 'Make Your Mark' ballot in February 2024.
 - c) A formal options appraisal of the arrangements for next Youth Mayor elections (February 2025).
 - d) An agreed, structured approach to how the Youth Council responds to consultation or representation requests from other organisations.
 - e) Development of an agreed plan (which will form part of the Council's Democratic Engagement Plan) for the Youth Council to play an active role in encouraging young people in Milton Keynes to understand and engage in politics, register to vote as soon as they are able, and improve turnout at local and parliamentary elections amongst young people.
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List of annexes

Annex A – Briefing Note – Youth Led Democracy Recommendations 2022-23
(November 2022)