

**Milton Keynes  
City Council  
Youth Services**

**Peer Review**

Date: 5 – 9<sup>th</sup> February 2024

**Final Report**

## 1. Executive Summary

Milton Keynes is a young city, born in 1967. The local authority (LA) and residents are dynamic, creative and full of ambition for the area. The population is young with 50% under 35 years, 26.1% under 20 years<sup>1</sup> and 22.2% are in school / full-time students<sup>2</sup>, and is also diverse by ethnicity (38 in 100 children live in families who identify as being from black, Asian and minoritised groups). It is well-connected and fast growing, with a number of head offices of well-known private sector business. The area benefits from 35% green space.

Historically Milton Keynes City Council (MKCC) employed professionally qualified youth workers to deliver open access youth provision. More recently services have been redesigned and MKCC youth workers now deliver targeted youth provision, with voluntary, charity and social enterprise (VCSE) partners providing a mixed offer of targeted and open access provision. MKCC democratic services employ a professionally qualified youth worker who facilitates, supports and drives the development of the youth council<sup>3</sup>, which encourages alignment with elected members.

Children's services includes professionally qualified youth workers and youth support workers, retained on Joint Negotiating Council (JNC) terms and conditions, employed in the contextual safeguarding and youth offending teams (YOTs), delivering targeted 1:1 youth work interventions. This includes community enrichment (reparation) work, the completion of independent return from missing interviews and work with young women at risk of exploitation.

Professionally qualified youth workers, youth support workers and youth support apprentices are employed in the children's services participation and engagement team, providing a wide range of interventions with young people referred from social care. External commissioned services are achieved through grant funds or one-off spend identified by elected members. These are coordinated and supported by the participation and engagement team manager, primarily through the youth provision forum (YPF) and the youth provision safe practice mark. The YPF is a collective of over 25 statutory and non-statutory youth organisations and is chaired by the Local Authority (LA). Youth provision is primarily coordinated at a strategic level by the children's services leadership team (CSLT). This is now supplemented with a newly formed participation strategic group (PSG) made up of heads of service and managers from various parts of the wider council including democratic services and public health.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/sources/census\\_2021/report?compare=E06000042](https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/sources/census_2021/report?compare=E06000042)  
(accessed 27/02/24).

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/customprofiles/build/#E06000042>  
(accessed 27/02/24).

<sup>3</sup> Including a Youth Mayor and a Deputy Youth Mayor.

## 2. Young assessors

The review team were very fortunate and grateful to have the insight and knowledge of two National Youth Agency (NYA) young assessors; Lana and Charlie. While their views and opinions have been integrated throughout the report, below is a summary of the key areas they observed and wish to emphasise.

The NYA young assessors were keen to emphasise consideration is to be given to the different needs of targeted and open access youth practice and a potential disconnect between the two. Lana spoke about improving organisation and communication between the two. This will be discussed in greater detail later in the report, particularly considering the role of youth workers and whether developing capacity for detached youth work could help bridge that connection and form smooth pathways for targeted young people to (re)engage with community provision.

The young assessors also felt strongly about points raised in the youth council focus group, suggesting young people did not always feel or know what action resulted from their input. This was contradictory to the clear value the council placed on the youth council and the impact this made on decision makers and services. It was felt that consideration needs to be given to the wider council and youth council relationship, and closing the feedback loop within this, enabling closer scrutiny given to impact derived from youth voice and participation.

Finally, the NYA young assessors wanted to comment that work is required measuring impact and progress and consideration for the use of outcome star, case studies and reports. This was discussed in focus groups held with both youth workers and partners and was particularly emphasised by Charlie in the final day presentation.

## 3. Key recommendations

There are a range of suggestions and observations within the main section of the report that will inform some 'quick wins' and practical actions to support this. The following are the review team's key recommendations to the council:

i. **Develop a Youth Strategy and Children and Young People's Plan, drawing upon needs assessments**

Throughout the peer review visit it was clear that Milton Keynes management and leadership have a deep knowledge of services and have a clear view of the improvements needed. The development of a youth strategy, feeding into a children and young people plan was an aspiration shared by many and would be a valuable tool for future development. The peer review team are keen to see that the strategy really reflects a youth work model, meeting Section 507B statutory duty and includes a robust needs assessment.

**ii. Mapping all existing provision across the authority, including numbers of professionally qualified JNC-Level 6 Youth Workers and Level 3 and 2 Youth Support Workers to inform the local offer**

The peer review team were unable to gain a clear picture of the map of youth work provision, despite the availability of a list of 101 providers made available in early pre-review documents (Youth Provision Milton Keynes, November 2021). The list did not provide the level of detail that would be gained through in-depth needs assessment, ecological mapping of the wider offer, workforce mapping (qualified youth workers) and a local strategy, which would aid in informing deployment of resources, workforce development and determining if provision is in the 'right' place and sufficient.

**iii. Raise the profile and purpose of youth work across the authority, with a clear and shared definition of youth work**

The peer review team saw several examples of good practice when visiting provision. However, there was an inconsistent view and understanding of 'what youth work is' amongst partners and internal (MKCC) colleagues. Some providers were delivering excellent services (such as, learning and skills training, specific skills based and targeted-based sessions) for young people, with strong elements of youth work practice (such as residential and outdoor activity). However, the review team saw little open access youth and community work being delivered. The LA and partners would benefit from an agreed definition of youth work to refer to and could include a framework, such as the national youth work curriculum.

**iv. Consider a workforce development strategy that can support VCSE**

In discussion with partners, it was clear that some felt there should be a stronger training and workforce development offer available to partners, including level 3 and 6 youth work training. One partner is delivering the level 3 youth support work training and questioned whether this should be developed and co-ordinated by the LA.

**v. Develop a quality assurance framework to complement the work of the safe practice mark**

The peer review team recognised that the safe practice mark was generally well-received and welcomed amongst partners. However, the review team felt this could be built upon and developed into a full quality assurance framework using tools, such as the national youth work curriculum, the NYA *youth work in a box* (practice standards toolkit) and resources from The Young People's Foundation.

**vi. Build on the Youth Provision Forum to develop more formal collaboration and capacity**

The YPF is recognised by MKCC, and partners, as a model of good practice, particularly for information sharing. The peer review team recommend this is strengthened and could become a vehicle for wider collaboration and building capacity. It was felt there are examples in other LAs of developing infrastructure support partnerships (i.e. Youth Alliances), led by the sector, which MKCC have the foundations for in order to replicate this model through the YPF.

**vii. Participation and Youth Voice – consider how this drives the Youth Strategy and Children and Young People's Plan**

MKCC prioritise young people's participation and youth voice. There is an excellent commitment to the youth council across council departments. Resources are invested in the children in care council and developments have commenced to implement a representative SEND youth forum. It was clear that MKCC leadership and management value the views and opinions of young people and that they can influence decisions and change. However, young people in the youth forum felt that they did not always see this influence and change. This was particularly noted by NYA young assessors.

The review team also felt that there could be greater inclusion of geographically and demographically diverse young people, particularly those living in disadvantaged and priority areas. There is evidence, through the year nine survey and the OxWell and BeeWell surveys, that young people are consulted with. However, it would have been valuable to have seen more evidence of engagement, participation and influence of young people from priority areas.

**viii. Consider the balance between targeted and universal services and the importance of detached youth work (preventative and early help)**

The peer review team felt there is a need to review the range within the offer, based on needs assessment and a local plan. Based on discussions with a range of respondents, the review team felt that if there was some retainment of open access delivery from MKCC professionally qualified youth workers, there would be a clear pathway for referred young people to access local community activity. It was notable that there was little evidence of a coordinated and strategic detached youth work offer, which could potentially aid in developing such targeted and universal links. From several parties, there were calls to further co-ordinate what is delivered to young people in order to ensure greater mutual knowledge between services.

**ix. Consider the management capacity needed to take this work forward and avoid a single point of failure**

There was clear recognition within MKCC and partners that the participation and engagement manager played a significant role as a champion for youth work. It was clear that the skills, knowledge, and experience of youth work predominantly and asymmetrically sit with the participation and engagement manager, making the post holder the single point of expertise within the council. This asymmetry of expertise within the council was commonly referred to by respondents as a potential *single point of failure*. Concerns were voiced that should this single point of expertise not be retained then youth work development would not continue to evolve on its current positive trajectory. The review team feel consideration could be given to how capacity for more youth work development might be found. It was felt there could be additional roles for managing the development of Section 507B and the council's statutory duty.

#### 4. Summary of the peer review approach

Independent external evaluation and feedback from the sector has endorsed peer reviews as an approach that promotes learning from a sector-led improvement perspective. All LAs and their partners are responsible for improving outcomes for children and young people, and it is recognised that an external and independent view can help to accelerate or consolidate progress.

The peer review team was sourced specifically to address the areas of focus highlighted by the MKCC. The team consisted of senior colleagues with significant experience of leading and managing children's and young people's services within local government and the VCSE sector, supported by an experienced peer review manager.

##### The peer review team

Peers were selected based on their relevant experience and expertise. The peers who delivered the peer review were:

- **Andy Lloyd**, Peer Review Manager, Head of Quality and Standards, National Youth Agency
- **Richard McHugh**, Peer Review Co-ordinator, Organisation Development Manager, National Youth Agency
- **Kevin Hall**, Former Director of Children's Services and National Youth Agency Associate
- **Tim Rumley**, Senior Youth Work Manager, Salford City Council
- **Angel Fletcher**, Policy and Public Affairs Manager, National Youth Agency
- **Lasharne Bent**, Youth Participation Officer, National Youth Agency
- **Lana Collins**, Young Assessor, National Youth Agency
- **Charlie McCarthy**, Young Assessor, National Youth Agency

##### The process

The peer review team prepared by reviewing a range of documents and information to ensure they were familiar with the council and the challenges it is facing. The team then spent four days onsite during which they:

- Heard from over forty people, including: young people, lead members, senior leadership team, front-line practitioners, managers and partners
- Visited local teams and partners
- Read background documentation
- Undertook visits to settings; observing sessions and talking to professionals.

This report provides a summary of the peer review team's findings. It builds on the feedback presentation provided by the peer team at the end of their on-site visit on Friday 9<sup>th</sup> February 2024. By its nature, the peer review is a snapshot in time. We appreciate that some of the feedback may be about things that MKCC are already addressing and progressing.

## 5. Scope and Focus

MKCC identified all five areas of focus for the peer review, and these were agreed at the beginning of the scoping process. The five areas are listed below:

- **Leadership and Management** (strategy, quality assurance, workforce support and development)
- **Practice and Impact** (skills, needs assessment, impact and evaluation)
- **Sufficiency** (statement of offer and secured resources to deliver, accessibility for all young people – targeted and open access)
- **Partnerships** (LA and VCS sector, distinct youth work within allied services)
- **Youth Voice and Participation** (structures and opportunities, rights-based and asset-based approaches, co-production of services / programmes)

During the on-site visit, the peer review team identified several cross-cutting issues that were covered in the final day feedback presentation, and these are included in the main findings below.

## 6. Main Findings

### Leadership and Management

It was clear to the peer review team that there is a highly experienced and passionate leadership, who champion youth services. This was delivered through a knowledgeable and committed leadership team, driving improvement across children's services and engaging the wider council in that endeavour. It was evident that political and officer leadership was ambitious for the young people of Milton Keynes. The review team saw a particularly strong commitment to youth voice and participation from leaders, which will be explored more in the 'Participation' section of this report.

The value placed in youth work as a professional practice was highlighted by the director of children's services, who noted that whilst all professionals working within children's services are viewed equally, "the youth worker profession doesn't appear as confident as others".

We met with public health managers who were able to evidence strong support for youth work, including open-access provision. One manager explicitly noted that '*youth work is good for public health*'. This resonates with the recognition across the sector that youth work is central to public health prevention, as well as more specifically for mental health, wellbeing and childhood trauma.

Clear and well-established communication channels exist between strategic and operational leaders and a wide range of partners, including schools and VCSE forums and networks. Examples of existing mechanisms for enabling clear communications at strategic and operational levels included the YPF, participation strategy group, and the Milton Keynes secondary headteachers group.

Milton Keynes children's services managers and leaders demonstrated knowledge and clear insights into the current position of the local youth offer together with a strong understanding of their services, including how and where they need to develop. Notably there was a clear recognition that practitioners felt that there has been a loss of identity for youth work<sup>4</sup>.

### ***Areas for consideration:***

Managers and leaders are very aware that they currently do not have a youth strategy and children and young people plan in place. Whilst the council delivery plan 2023/4 outlined some relevant plans for expanding youth provision to areas of need, through the peer review we have highlighted the need for developing a strategy, feeding into a robust children and young people's plan, including quality youth work and consideration of digital youth work, working towards the Section 507B statutory duty.

In addition, to comply with the council's statutory duty, a needs assessment, strategy and local offer for youth work requires development. There were examples of relevant local needs assessments which could be built on, these would benefit from coordination to provide a clear picture of need. Currently coordination and development of the local offer sits within the role of the participation and engagement manager, with clear channels for political oversight. However, as noted earlier, this brings inherent limited management capacity due to role stretch, and many respondents raised concerns that the organisation was overly reliant on this individual, which represents a potential single point of failure. Consideration of how best to mitigate this risk would be valuable (e.g. by identifying ways to increase capacity, skills, and knowledge).

### **Practice and Impact**

The review team was able to ascertain a range of strengths relating to practice and impact, including positive working relationships with schools, through which area specific needs can be developed; one example of this being anti-knife crime work, which is a priority for Milton Keynes<sup>5</sup>. Youth workers clearly build and maintain positive working relationships with young people. Likewise, Milton Keynes has demonstrably enthusiastic and committed youth support workers and apprentices, enabling a developing future workforce.

However, within some of the existing workforce there was a sense of becoming deskilled and youth support workers reported feeling undervalued and frustrated, with a strong desire for more community and detached work. Colleagues from cognate fields expressed support for the role of youth work, for example social work colleagues valued the specific skills and contribution of youth workers. The review team noted that there was an impressive variety of activities, projects and initiatives delivered by VCSE and other partners, along with an equally impressive and developing youth council. Additionally, there were other areas of

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<sup>4</sup> Please see Practice and Impact below for further detail.

<sup>5</sup> For wider examples of partnerships relating to this focus please see 'Partnerships' section below.



good practice that recurred throughout the review such as youth workers conducting return from missing interviews<sup>6</sup>.

In recent years there has been a change in direction for practice with a turn toward targeted provision (participation and contextual safeguarding), which has aided in retaining a dedicated workforce, with VCSE partners largely providing universal open-access opportunities. Whilst some staff have expressed being unhappy at this, Milton Keynes has taken the initiative to draw in the NYA to engage with the workforce in this regard, with the NYA supporting the approach broadly.

### ***Areas for consideration:***

Several partners identified an affinity with youth work values and principles and of those that the review team spoke with, some had youth work trained staff, although it was unclear if this applied to all staff. Other partners, whilst describing working with youth workers (in partnership), do not have qualified youth work staff but do draw on and have an affinity to youth work values and principles. Notwithstanding, it was widely regarded<sup>7</sup> that there is not a shared concept of youth work across the council and partners<sup>8</sup> and that the identity of youth work is, to some extent, lost. Developing a shared definition of youth work would be valuable in pursuit of the council's practice and impact aspirations.

In other discussions it was noted that provision of youth work training, largely falls to Milton Keynes Dons and there was some frustration expressed that the council do not take more of an active role in this. Whilst other training opportunities are available periodically, for example through the regional youth work unit and other national routes, there remained a local frustration regarding accredited training.

As noted earlier, a lack of suitable available spaces for youth work resonated across the review, particularly regarding universal open-access provision, with other respondents suggesting that spaces are available but are not consistently utilised. Adding that previously these have been utilised and currently represent a positive opportunity to capitalise on through the use of the local plan and network. Additionally, the review team were told about the council's embryonic aspirations to explore the use of local commercial spaces through developing partnerships and agreements with local industry<sup>9</sup>, which is something that the review team feel would be of value to the offer.

Measuring, collating, analysing and evaluating impact recurred throughout the review as a key area for development. Primarily this was discussed in terms of not being carried out in a uniform way across the offer (partners and LA). Some of the documents presented,

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<sup>6</sup> This work had previously been carried out by an external agency. The new arrangements were enabling youth workers to establish effective relationships and improve understanding of triggers leading to missing episodes.

<sup>7</sup> This key point recurred across discussions with a wide range of stakeholders, ranging from an elected member, director of children's services (DCS) through to partners.

<sup>8</sup> There was clear demonstration of application of youth work values and principles across the offer – however, the shared concept of youth work was absent.

<sup>9</sup> For example, the community space in the Santander building.

completed by youth workers to record their work had limited reflection and it was unclear how they were used to inform service development. The review team feel that a uniform approach to measuring and analysing impact would be a valuable mechanism for refining practice and defining emerging and changing needs across the offer at scale.

Notwithstanding, the partner organisations we spoke with expressed that they do draw on their data to inform future practice, assess needs and explore further potential partnership working. However, a uniform measurement and centralised collation and analysis would have significant potential in keeping the offer apace with shifts and changes in need, as well as aid in quality assurance across the offer. There are clear aspirations to establish uniform and functional forms of reflection and recording to demonstrate impact in the future. This would link well with the associated aspirations for the council to create a post specifically focusing on the statutory duty and which could also develop research of areas of need and similar.

Council colleagues reverberated these points from a different perspective. For example, drugs and alcohol services noted a disjoint between data required for core funding key performance indicators (KPIs) and the qualitative impacts, which are often not accounted for in funding performance measures. Colleagues gave the example of numbers of re-representation of young people for services, which is seen as a negative statistic. However, this is viewed by the service as a positive as it indicates that young people want to engage with the service and gain help beyond initial interventions.

Feedback from young people comes in various formats and is not collected and analysed uniformly across the offer. However, there are plans to collate and review this utilising the [Centre for Youth Impact](#) model and [portal](#). Through discussions with young people, in particular youth council members, there was a clear message that they do not feel that their views are always accounted for in action and that impact from their input is often not reported back to them.

## Sufficiency

Despite the challenging national context, the council is financially stable and reports a balanced budget that plans to sustain its investment in youth work provision across the local authority. From this foundation, the peer review team were able to identify some strengths in sufficiency. It was recognised that the council have retained a small group of professionally qualified JNC youth workers and JNC terms and conditions. The council have demonstrated a commitment to internally training youth workers through the employment of two youth support work apprentices.

There is a programme of open-access youth provision across Milton Keynes, mostly delivered through a range of third sector partners. The YPF is developing a network of VCSE organisations and strengthening communications between the local authority and youth organisations. The YPF has been well received and welcomed by many VCSE organisations in the area. The review team were able to see some of this throughout the visit, including the Monday evening New 2 UK Football project, Fullers Slade Youth Club and UDoIT Dance project.

### **Areas for consideration:**

It appears that whilst sufficiency of provision is being enhanced by stronger partnership working, open access provision across the authority is limited and therefore many young people may miss out on opportunities. Young people spoke of limited public transport links, and safety concerns regarding travel across Milton Keynes, and these were seen as significant barriers to participation and engagement by some. Similarly, there were concerns for safety in making journeys on foot to provisions (for example due to broken streetlights).

It was recognised by the peer review team that sufficiency was the area in need of greatest development, particularly considering Section 507B and the council's statutory duties. Specifically, it was recognised that the council have an over reliance on third sector partners to deliver universal provision. The review team felt that this was not coordinated and needs to be audited and mapped into a local youth offer. This would be a necessary first step to be built upon with a comprehensive needs assessment, quality framework, agreed outcome measurements, and wider offer of training and workforce development to partners.

It was particularly felt, in line with Section 507B, that a needs assessment is required to ensure a more proactive needs led approach to identifying and delivering open access provision. This point resonates with the appetite amongst the youth workforce who, as noted above<sup>10</sup>, feel that there is a need for more community-based work. The review team felt that consideration could be given to integrating some detached youth work into council youth worker's capacity, which would improve links and communication between the targeted offer and the external community based open-access provision. Similarly, there was some discussion with senior managers to consider the development of digital youth work.

The review team could see and understand the potential for a more co-ordinated third sector offer. There is a strong foundation in place through the YPF which is viewed by the council and partners as a strength and source of support for youth providers. However, the review team feel it would be valuable to consider how this develops and the potential to create more infra-structure support, such as a *youth alliance*. There is opportunity for this to be sector-led and create better outcomes, including securing greater private sector funding, in the areas of greatest need. There is also a missed opportunity for sharing of best practice and increased understanding of the various members' work and areas for collaboration.

The review team noted that there was not any visible engagement with uniformed organisations within the partnership. There also seemed to be a lack of join-up between the youth service and the work taking place with the Duke of Edinburgh's Award in schools or indeed any other form of adventurous outdoor education offer, which could link in with, and cut across, any future developmental work that may seek to leverage and further mobilise closer working with uniformed organisations and youth work in and with schools.

It was recognised that the *safe practice mark* is a model of good practice and enables monitoring of safeguarding policies and procedures. However, currently there is not a built-in mechanism for the council to measure how well these safeguarding policies are being

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<sup>10</sup> Please see Practice and Impact.

followed, instead only offering the ability to ensure that they are in place. Beyond these limitations within the *safe practice mark*, it is also important to note that the scheme does not quality assure more broadly beyond the focus of a safeguarding context. Third sector partners that the review team spoke with advised that they would welcome a measure to quality assure youth provision more broadly.

## Partnerships

Partnerships were viewed as being positive and the partners we spoke with were mostly supportive of the council and vice versa. For those that the review team spoke with, council initiatives, such as the YPF, Healthy Young Peoples Network (HYPN) and the *safe practice mark* were well received and perceived as being valuable. The HYPN is a resource to build on, with seventy partners, clear priorities and evidence of links with the youth participation team involving young people in informing services.

From discussions with VCSE partners, it was apparent, and as is common across the sector, that their funding derives from a range of sources. As noted earlier<sup>11</sup>, partners explained that they individually engage with the private sector to seek funding, identifying successes with this but with an awareness that individually long-term sustainability is challenging, and requires significant resource allocation. Additionally, this has potential to generate competition between youth organisations for funding rather than fostering collaboration.

There was clear evidence of strong relationships and communication with the local school community. However, it was not possible to ascertain the extent, scope and impact of partnerships between schools and youth work linking into communities and beyond the school gates. Largely, this is due to the absence of comprehensive mapping of the workforce, as well as that of uniformed impact measurement instruments across the offer. Public health was also evident as a strong partner and good collaborative work. Particularly mental health work was noted as an exemplar good practice and a model which could be built on for consultation, engagement and prioritisation (again outlining the value of youth work in the context of public health, as noted earlier).

### **Areas for Consideration:**

While partners valued the YPF and HYPN, there was a clear feeling that this model could be built upon to develop collaboration, share good practice and the development of services. The word '*disjointed*' was used often when describing the youth provision, sometimes by those who were not aware of what the council or the voluntary sector youth workers were doing. It was felt that if this partnership was developed more formally there is an opportunity to work collaboratively to develop funding streams, including working closer with Milton Keynes Community Foundation and accessing private sector funding for the youth sector.

The Participation Strategy Group (PSG) was recognised as a strength and opportunity to strategically co-ordinate the partnership. Terms of reference have been started for this group but needs strengthening. There is a clear role for the PSG to co-ordinate and lead

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<sup>11</sup> Please see Sufficiency.

the development of a youth strategy. However, it would be valuable for this to have significant partnership steer and engage young people from across demographic backgrounds to shape and design.

Whilst the review team are aware that there are services that have established and integral relationships with the police and wider partnerships with the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU), there was an absence of examples of other youth provision working with the police and other uniformed services such as fire and rescue services in an ongoing and sustainable manner. The review team feel that development of more sustained and co-ordinated partnerships between uniformed services, youth work and third sector organisations would link well for the development of youth work and employing a presence with and within health care, for example, in accident and emergency departments, which is seeing successes in other areas and organisations.

Nationally with the developments around the early help services in local authorities, many services now include youth workers as part of this offer and MKCC could explore how youth work can contribute to early help outcomes and work more closely together, given the changes in the new Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023) and social care reforms, as these include the contribution of the wider VCSE.

## **Youth Voice and Participation**

During the review we spoke with young people through a youth council focus group and during visits to youth provision across Milton Keynes. We also spoke with several managers, officers and partners involved with youth voice engagement, about participation and how the voices and opinions of young people are, heard, considered, integrated into the offer and influence change to services and into strategic groups.

It has already been commented in previous sections the strength and commitment held for youth voice and participation, most notably through a visible youth council. It was also noted that commitment is given to youth voice, through the children in care council. There is an emerging model for developing a SEND youth forum and the leads for this work were very clear on the need to evidence impact and change through this work. The review team also saw evidence of engagement and consultation with wider groups of young people through surveys, such as Year 9, OxWell and BeeWell.

### ***Areas for Consideration:***

There was much discussion and evidence of the youth council influencing and being integrated into democratic processes. However, members of the youth council viewed their influence differently. In discussions with members of the youth council, young people strongly emphasised that they sometimes feel their opinions are not always listened to and actioned. The young people we spoke with suggested that where they provide input it has sometimes felt for tokenistic reasons (for example they explained that it sometimes feels like a 'box tick'). However, moving the youth council to democratic services was widely viewed as having positive impact. Without exception, review team members were extremely

impressed with both the tenacity and commitment of the young people involved in the youth council, as well as the quality and diligence of their work.

From wider discussions ranging from partners to senior leaders, including the Director of Children's Services, there are clear aspirations to further develop co-production, which would be extremely valuable in developing youth led and well-informed services and provision. Along with these aspirations there were some pockets of participatory approaches to informing provision. Most notable was the example of Udoit Dance, who were able to very clearly articulate how their approach to developing provision and interventions is well aligned with the key youth work [principle](#) of 'active participation and empowerment of young people'.

It is admirable that the youth council is comprised of a relatively diverse demographic. However, despite the youth council being very diverse in terms of ethnicity and gender there was not any clear indicators of diversity in terms of other demographic features or lived experience (for example young people with lived experience of perpetrating crimes; Gypsy Roma Traveler young people; those who have or are experiencing school exclusion). Further diversification through, within and beyond the youth council would aid in achieving Milton Keynes aspirations to further develop coproduction and in turn better enable youth led and well-informed services<sup>12</sup>.

## 7. Next Steps

The peer review team hope that MKCC will find the above findings to be a considered and a true reflection of the discussions that the review team had with council staff, partners and young people in Milton Keynes. MKCC and colleagues will now want to consider how to incorporate the peer review team's findings into your ongoing planning. Relevant details are included below should you wish to access further support via the NYA.

For further improvement support you can contact the NYA's Head of Quality and Standards: Andy Lloyd - Tel: 07842 437176, email: [andy@nya.org.uk](mailto:andy@nya.org.uk)

Once again, thank you for participating in this review and please pass on our gratitude to everyone involved, particularly Richard Lee, James Dove and Martin Clement for their preparation work and day-to-day support of the Peer Review team.

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<sup>12</sup> The review team are aware that Milton Keynes has both aspirations and plans to further develop this area of work, for example the Participation and Engagement Manager explained that there is scope for developing youth voice key strategic groups, which aligns well with the importance of further developing a paradigm of young people as key partners in developing strategy.

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[nya.org.uk](http://nya.org.uk)