

<b>Subject:</b>	Update on the Girls' Policy Forum
<b>Reason for briefing note:</b>	The Children's Overview and Scrutiny panel are interested to know how young women and girls are able to raise their voices on any policy area within the Council's purview, and indeed, beyond.
<b>Responsible officer(s):</b>	Elaine Keating/Lin Ferguson
<b>Senior leader sponsor:</b>	Cllr Airey
<b>Date:</b>	11 March 2019

## SUMMARY

1. The Girls' Policy Forum was established in April 2018 so that the voices of young women and girls play an active role in shaping life in the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.
2. The Forum meets once a month to discuss policies and papers and general areas of interest to young women and girls in the area, with a view to the Forum feeding directly into policy making.
3. The Forum has already been engaged in a number of conversations including: Litter in Schools and Big Belly Bins, National Takeover Day, and the Cycle Action Plan. The Forum have invited the architects for the Nicholson centre to hear their views about the opportunities presented by regeneration.

## 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Plan International UK report 'The State of Girls' Rights in the UK' posed the question, 'What is the current state of girls' rights in the UK?' and concluded that the answer is clear: not equal. By exploring the real experiences of girls in the UK, the report found that whilst the UK may be the fifth-richest country in the world, it is failing its girls, and failing to meet international standards set out in human rights frameworks and the United Nations new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- 1.2 The report also compared girls' rights in the UK at local authority level, which showed that young women have different experiences depending on where they live. Geography plays a significant part and whilst the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead is not in the worst 10 local authorities to be a girl, it is not in the top 10 either. It is known that access to excellent education,

public health services, living in a safe environment free from the fear of harm, and more, are all essential factors for young people to thrive. The Borough holds to the vision that a person's background, family income, ethnicity, postcode or any other circumstance should not be a limiting factor in their future outcomes or wellbeing.

- 1.3 The purpose of the report was that policy makers and decision makers could initially recognise the reality of the state of girls' rights in the UK is not where it both could and should be, and then act to change it.
- 1.4 Cllr Airey brought a motion to the Council in February 2018 so that the Borough could make a difference on its own patch and aspire to be the very best local authority to be a girl in the UK, from the grassroots and not just top-down. Therefore the motion sought to redress the balance in RBWM by establishing a Girls' Policy Forum.

It was resolved unanimously that the Council:

- i. Notes the Plan International report 'The State of Girls' rights in the UK' and the increasing coverage of issues where women experience a different climate to men.
- ii. Notes its leadership role and establishes a new 'Girls' Policy Forum', operated by our youth services, so that the voices of young women and girls play an active role in shaping life in the Royal Borough.
- iii. Asks the Leader to write to the schools and youth groups in the Borough to make them aware of the Forum and appoint representatives, and to commit to taking the views of the Forum into consideration when making decisions.
- iv. As a consequence, the Girls' Policy Forum was established in April 2018.

## **2. KEY IMPLICATIONS**

- 2.1 The Forum provides a platform for the Council to help promote the voices of young women and girls so that they are able to enjoy all of the rights that living in the Borough and country affords in equal measures to their male counterparts.
- 2.2 The aim of the Girl's Policy Forum is that the group fed into policy making before and during the process, not after the event, so that the Council is proactively seeking to listen to young women and girls, where previously their voices had not been sufficiently heard.
- 2.3 The Girls' Policy Forum represents young women and girls living and receiving education in the Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead.

### **3. DETAILS - TERMS OF REFERENCE**

- 3.1 The Girls' Policy Forum is aimed at 11-18 year old (up to 25 with learning difficulties) young women and girls.
- 3.2 The Forum is operated and facilitated by the Youth Service and the Youth Engagement Officer, Elaine Keating, is the main lead. The Lead Member of Children Services, Cllr Airey and the Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help, Lin Ferguson, are also in attendance.
- 3.3 The terms of the Forum run from September of one year to the following July.
- 3.4 Each year the Leader will write to schools and youth groups in the Borough to make them aware of the Forum and appoint representatives. At present we have pupils from Furze Platt, Newlands, Churchmead, Altwood and Windsor Girls who regularly attend the meetings.
- 3.5 We are keen to increase the membership to broaden the representation of young women and girls from across the borough and will enlist the staff of the Youth Service to reach some of our more vulnerable young women and girls.
- 3.6 The officers of the Council have made a commitment to take the views of the Forum into consideration when making decisions.
- 3.7 The meetings will be led by the young women and girls in attendance, who will chair the meeting, set the agenda, take minutes and appoint committees and sub groups as and when necessary. However, in the interim, Elaine Keating has been undertaking this role whilst the young women and girls increase their confidence.

### **4. WHAT WE HAVE DONE SO FAR**

- 4.1 The most exciting opportunity to date was to have a Q&A meeting with the Prime Minister, Theresa May, on the 1 February 2019. The girls were given the opportunity to ask questions about her life, what inspired her, her education, interests and hobbies. Her advice to her younger self was "always to keep your eye on the main goal."
- 4.2 The Forum has had a number of guest speakers over the last number of months from around the Council, who have spoken about their roles and responsibilities and how the young women and girls can become involved in a range of initiatives like cycling. Gordon Oliver presented the cycling action plan and the young women and girls talked about why they don't always feel safe cycling to school and how this could be overcome.

- 4.3 There has been significant concern expressed about litter within local schools and the community as a whole. Naomi Markham, the Waste Strategy Manager from the Strategy and Commissioning team has presented to the Forum on Big Belly Bins and some posters to use in schools are currently being developed. Members of the Forum also took on a project to assess if the bins in our local streets are in the correct place.
- 4.4 The mental health of young women and girls in the Borough is also a particular concern and Sian Smith from Public Health spoke to the Forum about the feasibility of taking a project forward. Allison Bradshaw spoke to the group about the Early Help Service in the Borough and Suki Hayes also came to the Forum to talk about the Inclusion Charter.

## **5. NEXT STEPS**

- 5.1 Although this Forum has not been established for long, it has been very active, whilst also formulating how it sees itself going forward.
- 5.2 There are a number of exciting events and projects coming up over the next number of months:
- i. The designing of 2 litter posters which will be sent out to all schools in the Borough and attendance at school assemblies.
  - ii. The Forum has been asked to undertake a project around inclusion for young people, with the aim of presenting this at the Inclusion Summit in September 2019.
  - iii. Improvements to Maidenhead Town Centre, including an engagement session with the architects working for the new owners of the Nicholson centre.
  - iv. Attendance at Council management meetings in order to promote the work of the group and how the Forum can be consulted on potential policy making in a range of areas.
- 5.3 It is anticipated that over the coming months, the young women and girls who attend will feel more confident to facilitate the Forum themselves, with support from elected members and officers.
- 5.4 There are also a range of issues that the young women and girls would like to tackle over the next year:
- i. Mental health and its effects on young people.
  - ii. Genetic-engineering on animals and whether or not it should be allowed.

- iii. Should vaccines and abortion be a choice.
  - iv. The right to the best healthcare system young women and girls can have.
  - v. Charity events.
- 5.5 Members of the council's leadership team have been invited to consider how the Forums' views can be sought and reflected in policy making across the Council.

## **6. FEEDBACK FROM REGULAR ATTENDEES**

- 6.1 "The Girls' Policy Forum helps me grow my confidence as I suggest ideas and work in a team. Also the feeling that the Girls' Policy Forum can change something for the better."
- 6.2 "It is interesting and informative, as there is a wide range of speakers who share different issues they are trying to tackle within the local community."
- 6.3 "There is a nice atmosphere among the group, which allows for more open conversations and comfort within."
- 6.4 "It is a separate opportunity from those in a school environment, allowing a chance to meet with others and discuss all aspects of the community."
- 6.5 "I believe it's an opportunity for me, a youth, to really help my borough. The achievements we have already made are brilliant and all members truly learn a lot. Everyone goes away with experience in working in teams, volunteering, speaking up and coming up with great and inventive ideas. Its has such a positive impact."
- 6.6 "I really enjoy coming to the session as we always discuss important matters in society. I also attend, so that I can have a voice in what we are discussing; I want to know what would impact upon me and other girls and women. I like the freedom of speech and the non-judgmental space to voice opinions and ideas. Most of all, it is only girls that take part. So I don't feel judged or misunderstood in anyway"