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Running A Youth Council

A guide by members of the Surrey Heath Youth Council

Introduction

The Surrey Heath Youth Council are a group of 11-18 year olds that represent all young people, across the borough of Surrey Heath. We are entirely youth-led and stand up for the concerns and viewpoints of our peers regardless of location, religion, race, gender, disability or sexuality. This guide aims to share a model for how to operate a successful youth council and inspire young people to stand up for their voices in the most effective way.

General Format

The group is comprised of around 25 young people and represents all minority groups as well as each ward within our borough as best as it can. Our meetings are held within a local church but, in the past, we have used venues from conference rooms to libraries. We meet weekly from 5:00 - 6:30 which we find is an optimal frequency to balance productivity and ensuring sufficient members can attend meetings. Our meetings are structured but relaxed and give an opportunity for discussion and working on our latest projects.

Projects

The SHYC works on the concept of projects, each representing a concern or viewpoint of young people and converging on a measurable goal or outcome. Examples of our past projects include Curriculum for Life, Anti Bullying and Mental Health Awareness. This section aims to detail how we decide on projects and how they are run.

Consultation

Every SHYC begins by consulting the young people of Surrey Heath. We start by deciding a list of potential projects based on personal experience, the findings of Youth Councillors and external input. As an example, we used 2017 Make Your Mark findings to inspire our 2018 consultation. We then present the consultation to our peers in an online format such as Google Forms so results can easily be collected.



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Project Descriptions

Although you won't know the format of the project at this point, it is important to research/decide a short summary of what the topic or issue is about so young people can make an informed choice.

Structuring the Consultation

We ask for respondents to rate each topic out of 5 to indicate how passionately they feel about it. You can then make a decision as a Youth Council which project to work on based on the data you collect. An example is to choose the project with the highest amount of 4s and 5s.

Collecting Feedback

The easiest way to distribute your consultation is via local schools. Schools are very keen to be associated with youth voice groups such as Youth Councils and will happily provide time for your survey to be completed. A good way to get in touch is always getting each member to speak to a teacher at their own school.

Planning

Arguably the difference between success and failure, clear goals must be set before the project begins. We use a set of questions to make us think about what we want for the young people we represent.

1. *Why is the project important? What issues are being solved?*

We decide a clear definition of how the young people in our area will benefit from the project.

2. *What are the outcomes of the project? What do you hope to achieve?*

We bullet point clear outcomes that we can measure our project against.

3. *How can this be fulfilled? What are the key stages?*

We come up with a list of stages to complete the project.

At this point, we often use a Gantt chart or something similar to map out a timeline of when we hope to reach certain points.

Groups and Project Logs

At SHYC, our projects are often multi-faceted and require us to divide into small sub-teams. To manage this procedure, each sub-group elects a leader who will ensure discussion and work stays on track and will update a project log.

Project logs track:



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- Tasks for each meeting
- Actions to be completed between meetings
- Any progress notes the rest of the groups need to know

Project logs allow all members to see what needs to be done and proactively work towards outcomes.

Running the Projects

A significant amount of time during the meeting is dedicated to project work according to the timelines, planning documents and logs. We normally aim for a project to run across one school term and culminate in an event such as our Youth Conference. At the end of the project, it is important to look back at the plans and ensure all the goals were met.

Roles

In order to provide structure and ensure tasks are completed, it is essential to have set roles within the Youth Council. This section aims to cover what roles we use, how young people are elected and how young people can successfully take on these tasks.

Overview of Roles

Co-Chairs

The 2 Co-Chairs run meetings and set the agenda, ensuring contribution and enforcing rules. The Co-Chairs are supported by the Youth Workers to review councillor's effectiveness and ensure the representativeness of the Youth Council. Overall, the Co-Chairs make key decisions to plan the work of the Youth Council.

Recruitment Officer

The recruitment officer is responsible for ensuring the Youth Council has a large and representative membership and taking action to keep numbers up. The recruitment officer will make decisions in correspondence with the Co-Chairs and perform tasks such as planning and delivering assemblies, sending letters to schools and meeting with specific participation groups that are underrepresented on the Youth Council.

Treasurer

The treasurer is responsible for securing the necessary funding to run the Youth Council and cover any project costs. This is carried out according to the details in "*Applying for Funding*" with the assistance of the Youth Workers.



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Scribe

The scribe is responsible for recording the discussions, progress and actions at each meeting for future reference and ensure that it is shared according to “*Sharing Information*”.

Email Manager

The email manager is responsible for keeping and sharing a list of all relevant contacts as well as responding to emails in coordination with the Co-Chairs and sending emails on behalf of the Youth Council.

Social Media Manager

The social media manager(s) are responsible for producing, interacting with and responding to Youth Council relevant online content. This includes releasing photos and posts at the direction of the Co-Chairs and generally keeping a consistent online presence on behalf of the Youth Council.

Digital Manager

The Digital Manager ensures the platforms described in “*Sharing Information*” and “*Communication*” are maintained and organised. They work closely with the Youth Workers and the Co-Chairs to ensure that regulations are adhered to and data is managed securely.

Elections

Elections for roles are run annually (although an individual election may be necessary if a young person leaves or steps down) in the Spring term and are relatively relaxed. Youth councillors will receive one week’s warning from the current Co-Chairs along with a reminder of the roles available and will then prepare short speeches covering why they want to go for a role and what they can bring to it. The first portion of the meeting will be dedicated to elections where each role will be announced and speeches read out. Following each section of speeches, candidates will leave the room while councillors write their votes on paper and the results are counted. Results will be announced immediately after.

Structure of Meetings

It is important for the content of meetings to be planned and agendas to be distributed to ensure that meetings can be productive and purposeful. This section covers how to run meetings in an efficient way while still allowing time for discussion and communication.



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Agendas

The Co-Chairs will produce an agenda before each meeting that contains the planned tasks/discussion points for each section of the meeting as well as listing guests and actions to be reviewed. This will be shared according to “*Sharing Information*” prior to the meeting and used throughout to ensure that councillors arrive prepared and the meeting runs smoothly.

Start of Meeting

This section of the meeting begins with a review of actions from the previous week and any other updates each councillor has. Any guests at the meeting will then be able to address the group. Following this, any other discussion points can be raised by Co-Chairs or other councillors.

Main Meeting

This section of the meeting is dedicated to project work or any other tasks set by the Co-Chairs. Project groups may split off and work according to their project logs and timelines. This time may also be used for workshops or longer presentations from guests. This section will be the longest in length with ideally an hour of the 1 hour 30 minute dedicated.

End of Meeting

The end of the meeting gives an opportunity for project logs to be updated and any agenda items for the next meeting to be raised. Groups report back on the work they have done to share with all youth councillors and actions are set.

Sharing Information

It is vital that project planners, timelines, agendas, minutes and other documents produced by the Youth Council can be securely stored and accessed by all youth councillors. This section covers the best way to achieve this.

Google Drive

All SHYC documents are stored within a shared Google Drive folder. Anyone familiar with cloud storage recognises this platform as easy to use while also supporting mobile apps and real-time collaboration features that are second to none. While the SHYC has no official affiliation with Google Drive we recommend this platform as the best way of ensuring work is



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never lost and can be picked up on even if a councillor doesn't attend a meeting. We use a main account controlled by the youth workers to own the folder to ensure members can be added and removed as the youth council membership changes.

Setup

A youth worker can visit <https://drive.google.com> to create an account. Once this is completed you will be brought to "My Drive". You can use the "New" button to create a folder. Then right-click the folder and choose "Share" to begin entering Youth Councillor's emails.

Communication

It is essential that Youth Councillors are able to communicate effectively outside of meetings to ensure actions are completed and that numbers are known ahead of meetings. This section covers how you can communicate easily without resorting to using social media for a purpose it wasn't designed for.

Slack

Slack is a communication platform that is totally isolated from the rest of your online life, designed with business level quality in mind. Even a free membership allows a "workspace" to be created, separate from all other Slack users, that features different "channels" allowing conversation to be focused in on the Co-Chairs and youth workers, different project teams to have more focus, or announcements to be sent to all youth councillors.

Setup

A youth worker can visit <https://slack.com/create> to sign up for an account and create a "workspace" for the youth council. As part of this process, the email addresses of councillors are entered so they receive a unique invite link.

Use by Councillors

When councillors receive the email from the previous step they are automatically helped to install the app where they can begin creating communication "channels" and sending messages. The youth worker account will have full access to view and delete everything.

Online Presence

It is paramount to the success of your Youth Council that your work is shared and talked about online and people have any easy way to contact you. This section covers everything from getting on the web to managing your social channels effectively.



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Getting Online

It's important to have your own website and email so that people can easily contact your group. Surrey Youth Voice can get you set up with their free email and website solution that gives you a custom email address (without the @gmail.com) and an easy to use blog system. If you want, they can use an entirely custom domain you own (e.g myyouthcouncil.com) from a registrar such as <https://uk.godaddy.com>, <https://www.dynadot.com> or <https://domains.google/>.

Social Media

We recommend maintaining a presence on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. The Twitter platform is ideal for connecting with activists, businesses, organisations and other relevant groups to spread your message and get involvement with your campaigns. Facebook is also great for this purpose and you can even set it up to send all your posts to Twitter. Instagram with its more photographic and personal focus is ideal for connecting with other young people. It can also be set up to send all photos to Facebook and Twitter.

It is important to keep a consistent brand on all your accounts. Use the same profile picture (ideally your logo if you have one), a banner featuring your members and add the link to your website. Regular updates boost engagement even if it is just showing you at work on your latest project.

Recruitment

Finally, SHYC wouldn't be anything without its members who are inspired and dedicated to putting in the effort. Here we go over the easiest way to recruit and the importance of new members.

Representing Young People

As a youth council, it is your job to represent all young people regardless of age, race, religion, sexuality, school or any other factors. Bringing on new members not only gives the group renewed focus and inspiration for projects, but also shows you opinions from groups you may not have represented well enough before.

Process

If you are using the Surrey Youth Voice website setup, it features an application form to collect basic details and find out why a person wants to join the youth council and what they can bring. We read this out in our meetings before having a quick discussion and vote to see



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if we will accept the applicant. Unless we have serious concerns or high membership, we do not like to turn away anyone from using their voice.

Recruiting

The easiest way to recruit is to spread your message. Produce posters and leaflets, and have them displayed in all your local schools; contact schools and see if they would be willing to mention you in their newsletter; reach out to your borough council to see how they could help; provide primary schools with letters for their year 6 students; deliver assemblies in your own schools; reach out to specific participation groups; and ensure that you inform people how great it is for their community, mental wellbeing, CV and awards such as DofE.

Working Together

If your Youth Council is to succeed, you must work together with other youth voice groups in your area and maintain contact with organisations such as the Surrey Youth Cabinet (run by Surrey County Council) to link with wider issues and the UK Youth Parliament. This section gives all the details on working together effectively.

Surrey Youth Cabinet

The Surrey Youth Cabinet at the Surrey County Council provides a link to our local MYPs (Members of U.K. Youth Parliament) and runs county-wide campaigns. If your Youth Council is just starting or hasn't reached out to other groups before, contact them (youthcabinet@surreycc.gov.uk) to see if they are running any interesting campaigns or to get involved with spreading the Mark Your Mark vote.

Specific Participation Groups

A number of participation groups are run for young people such as young carers or people with a disability. Try and reach out to your local groups and ask to come along to a meeting so you can ensure that their views are covered by your work as a Youth Council and all young people are able to feel involved.

Applying for Funding

Here is a list of organisations who may award a grant to help your youth council.

- Alec Dickson Trust <http://www.alecdicksontrust.org.uk/apply/>
 - National Lottery Community Fund
<https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/funding/under10k>



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- Community Foundation for Surrey

<https://www.cfsurrey.org.uk/apply-for-funding-3/expression-of-interest-form-groups/>

- Surrey County Council Member's Allocations

<https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/councillors-and-committees/members-allocations>

Example Project

This section offers a dive into one of our recent projects on Curriculum for Life and takes you through how we completed it from start to finish so you can do the same.

Introduction

We knew from our consultation that young people wanted a "Curriculum for Life" and felt unprepared for life after school. Our project began by deciding on the format we wanted to present this topic in. We created the concept of a "Youth Conference" where young people would be able to come and take part in workshops as well as hear talks from guest speakers.

Venue

The next step was to decide how long our event would be to book a venue. We chose a 3 hour long time to pack plenty of content while keeping students interested. After reaching out to local schools, we found a school who offered us space to run the workshop and an estimate of numbers. We visited to ensure the space would support our concept for workshops and accepted their kind offer. We also agreed that we would provide the refreshments.

Guests

We reached out to local businesses, universities and people with knowledge on the topic offering a speech or workshop. In the end we found these inspiring guests to be a part of the Youth Conference.

Royal Holloway - Kally.Tomkins@rhul.ac.uk

HireHigher - adelle@hirehigher.co.uk

University of Surrey - l.carswell@surrey.ac.uk

Amanda (interviews) - ajwr38@yahoo.co.uk

Patrick (self employment) - abacuswindowcleaningltd@gmail.com

Murray (Camberley and District Job Club) - mcrowlands@btinternet.com



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Structuring

Now we needed to structure the event - using the space available, the maximum amount of students and the number of speakers - to set out when workshops would occur. We chose a schedule of speeches to address the whole group, while workshops would work on a rotation system. We then informed the speakers of the time they would need to prepare for.

Inviting

We then prepared a letter to local schools, informing the number of students they could bring and the purpose and speakers of the event. We emailed and spoke to teachers at our own schools to ensure the message was heard. Once numbers were confirmed we informed our venue school and offered them any remaining spaces.

Running the Day

We arrived early before the event started to ensure we knew the room layout and could get the speakers and projector ready. Once schools arrived, we took down names at a sign-in table and assigned groups for the rotation. A welcome speech was provided by the Deputy Mayor, one of our guests. Youth Councillors had copies of the schedule to switch people between rooms and introduce the speakers as they came on. We closed with thanks and information on joining the youth council.

Summary

Thanks for reading! Hopefully, this guide has helped cover the basics of running a youth council.

This guide was produced for Surrey Youth Voice by Jacob Wrenn and the Surrey Heath Youth Council.

Please be sure to contact us contact@youthvoice.uk for any questions or support you may need as a young person creating a youth council.



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