Lewisham Young Mayor's Project

Kieran Lang, Young Mayor for Lewisham 2011/12
Chezney Speed-Skyers, Deputy Young Mayor of Lewisham 2011/12
Sir Steve Bullock, Mayor of Lewisham
1. **Abstract**

“By giving young people a real say and genuine decision-making power within the borough, we believe we can make Lewisham a better place to live in, not just for young people, but for everyone” (Sir Steve Bullock, Mayor of Lewisham 2006)

The Young Mayor’s project is at the heart of Lewisham’s Children and Young People’s citizenship and participation strategy. As a key priority for the Mayor and Council, the project has provided a range of opportunities for children and young people to become engaged and it has ensured that young people have been consulted on the development and delivery of public services.

The project enables young people, politicians, council officers and partners to work together to develop ideas, while also addressing issues of concern and interest. In doing so, young people’s active and effective participation in democratic processes and local governance is genuinely enhanced. The Young Mayor’s project plays an active role in helping to develop community cohesion in the borough and it is also a critical element of the continued work underway in Lewisham to widen and extend opportunities for young people in our local areas.

2. **Introduction**

The voice of the child has long been recognised as an essential component in shaping youth policy, improving educational outcomes and contributing to civic life and community well being.

By way of context, Lewisham is an inner London borough with a population of 258,500. Of that population approximately 62,000 are aged 0 – 19. According to ONS statistics, 23,300 young people come from BME communities.

The Young Mayor’s Project began in 2004 to mirror the direct election of the Mayor of Lewisham. The initial idea for a Young Mayor’s scheme had been piloted in Middleborough but had only lasted for one year. In developing the Young Mayor’s project in Lewisham, a number of key challenges were being addressed – including increasing the participation of young people in the life of the borough through a formal structure that worked centrally and closely with elected politicians. The Lewisham scheme, which was also initially on a pilot basis elected the eighth Young Mayor, Kieran Lang, in October 2011, with a turnout of 42%.

3. **Method/ Practice**

*The Young Mayor and Election process*

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1 ONS 2007 Mid Year Population Estimate
2 ONS 2006 Ethnicity Estimates
The key components of the project are the elected Young Mayor and the work of the Young Advisors Group and Young Citizens’ Panel. Each year a Young Mayor is elected by young people from across the borough. The elections are promoted and held in every secondary school and college in Lewisham. The schools’ registers are used as they closely resemble an electoral roll for young people.

Provision is also made for postal voting for young people educated outside the borough or not in school for any other reason and ballot papers are sent to all home-educated young people.

Candidates must either live or attend school or college in Lewisham borough and be aged 13-17 years. To stand for election each candidate must obtain nominations from 50 of their peers and attend a one day training session. The training includes how to write a manifesto and run a campaign and what to expect if they get elected. Candidates are encouraged to set up a “campaign team” of their peers to support them and they have just over three weeks to campaign. In the past this has included young people taking assemblies in different schools, public hustings, campaigning with leaflets on the street and using social networking to spread their message to their peers.

On polling day, the Council’s electoral services team run the election in exactly the same way they run the adult elections. Ballot boxes, voting booths and electoral staff are stationed at each secondary school and college in the borough for the duration of the school day (+half an hour either side). All young people resident or attending a school in the borough aged 11 – 18 can vote.

The count is held the following day, again with the support of electoral staff, and young people assist in this process. The culmination of the process is the results ceremony where the new Young Mayor, Deputy Young Mayor and Young Advisors are announced. Elections now take place during Local Democracy Week each year and voter registration for 16-18 year olds is promoted at the same time.

The second place candidate automatically becomes the Deputy Young Mayor and the third and fourth candidates from the election are automatically invited to serve as Young Advisors to the Young Mayor and the Deputy Young mayor. If they want to, the third and fourth place candidates can also represent Lewisham at the United Kingdom Youth Parliament (UKYP).

Young Advisor’s Group

The Young Advisors are a group of around 25 young people who act in a similar capacity to a cabinet. Each member is ‘elected’ onto Young Advisors either through the Young Mayor’s election or by a specific group whom they represent. We also encourage any young person in the borough who is interested to come along to the meetings, find out how it works and get involved, in doing so aiming to keep the group flexible and accountable to the young people in the borough. The Young Advisors share the work load of the
Young Mayor and deputy Young Mayor and importantly help in formulating ideas for spending the £30,000 budget. Having identified ideas and consulted with other young people the Young Mayors budget is presented to the Mayor and Cabinet for approval.

As the project has developed there has been an increase in the demands made upon the Young Mayor. In this regard the Young Advisors have been crucial to the project. This collective working between the Young Mayor and Advisors has enabled the initiative to get involved in a wide range of activities – it ha also helped involve more young people in the process. This group meets weekly to support the business of the Young Mayor and to deputise at events where appropriate. Elected Young Mayors often stay involved in the project as a young advisor after their term, this enables them to share their knowledge and experience with incoming young people.

The Young Advisors have been involved in the appointment process for key Council posts such as the Head of Commissioning for Children and Young People and increasingly in commissioning processes including those for the Positive Activities Fund and for the provision of Children’s and Families Support Services. The Young Mayor and Advisors contribute to strategic documents such as the Children and Young People’s Plan, the sustainable communities strategy and regeneration programmes within the borough. They are always part of Corporate assessments and inspections, sometimes supporting other young people and sharing their ideas with the wider local authority and partners.

Regionally and nationally Lewisham Young Mayor’s Project also works with the Greater London Authority, the British Youth Council, the UK Youth Parliament and UK Youth. The Young Mayor and Advisors have also advised and worked with many other local authorities and young people about developing young people’s voice and democratic structures. Recently we organised a conference about young people’s responses to austerity with young people form Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

The project works with European partners (in the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Norway, Poland, France and Sweden) through the Youth in Action Programme, which is European funding which is administered by the British Council. Groups of young people have met and learnt from each other about diversity and culture, engagement processes and democracy as well as having fun. Young people, working with politicians and officers, have met to discuss a joint manifesto, models of participation, impact and commitment of senior politicians and officers to support young people’s involvement in local governance and political processes.
**An example fortnight of the activities of Young Mayor and Advisors.**

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<td>No.82 Preview</td>
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<td>Discussing bullying issues with young people</td>
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<td>Politics Outside In</td>
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<td>Round Table Discussion with Ed Miliband</td>
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**Young Citizens’ Panel**

The Young Citizens’ Panel has an entirely open membership meaning any young person aged 11-18 either living or at school or college in Lewisham is able to join. The Citizens’ Panel is an overarching group with a composition which aims to welcome members of many different groups who work with young people around citizenship, politics and local issues, as well as individuals who are interested in participating.

The panel has in excess of 700 members and exists in a virtual format using social media such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to communicate with young people and others and to recognise and celebrate their achievements. There is also a monthly live event for people to meet up and discuss issues. Members are invited to participate in various opportunities throughout the year; these include one-off consultations and training opportunities related to participation (e.g. peer evaluators of the youth service). Panel members are consulted on various subjects identified by young people and by other stakeholders. The aim is to try and provide a range of ways that young people can participate with the B-Involved website set to be re-launched in May 2012 to make more use of YouTube video content as identified as a priority by the young people.

**4. Organisation and Management**

The Office of the Young Mayor employs two full-time qualified youth and community staff and relies on additional personnel time and resources across the Council and Public Agency Partners to deliver the programme throughout the year. The lead member of staff is the Advisor to the Young Mayor who is responsible for the Young Mayor’s diary and activities, delivering projects and supporting the Young Mayor to achieve what he/she hopes to with their year. The project receives support from the Youth Support Service, Children and Young Peoples directorate and the Electoral Services team.
There is a wide network of partners and organisations we work with in the borough and regionally. This includes working closely with all secondary and primary schools and colleges and with the youth and voluntary sector. Working with other participation projects in the borough, the youth service and schools are key in making the opportunities available to as many young people as possible in the borough.

The project sits distinctly from the Youth Service in Lewisham and instead is attached to the Mayor’s Office. This is key in providing genuine dialogue between the Executive Decision Maker (Directly Elected Mayor) in the council and the Young Mayor and his/her advisors.

Including personnel costs, but excluding the Young Mayor’s own budget, the Office of the Young Mayor costs around £150,000 per year. The largest outgoing, after salaries, is running the election.

5. Impact

“Lewisham’s young people feel that the community cares for them” (Sarah Jinodu, UKYP Representative, 2010/11)

“This is one of the ways that we can be influential...do things we want to do...I feel like if you want to change things then do it for yourself...I think that's why lots of us get involved in the Young Advisors, we get to do it for ourselves” (Jacob Sakil, Young Mayor of Lewisham, 2009/10).

“We’re the leaders of tomorrow and it gave me a chance to shape young people’s futures positively rather than let adults do it for us” (Lola Mustapha, Deputy Young Mayor of Lewisham, 2009/10)

“I feel I can make a difference in my community and I know I'm making a positive contribution” (Rochelle Gidden, Young Advisor, 2009 onwards)

“I have changed so much in the year that I’ve been Young Mayor. When I first got elected I never realised just how much respect I would get from adults and young people. And just how important my role and opinions were. It’s been a brilliant and scary year...but definitely worth it.” (Miguel Gutierrez Astudillo, Young Mayor of Lewisham, 2008/09)

“I like the Young Advisors because it shows that politics is not all about sitting in a fitted suit for 4 hours in a conference...it shows you that politics is closely related to you...you are involved in politics each and every day of your life...its all about opinions and through the Young Advisors I’m able to express my opinions and see them manifested” (Justin Cole, Young Mayor of Lewisham, 2007/08)

“Being Young Mayor is a great experience. It opens up lots of new opportunities including meeting new people, being involved in new ideas and activities and having responsibility for influencing decisions on behalf of other young people” (Siobhan Bell, Young Mayor, 2006/2007)
“It is great opportunity to demonstrate the way in which adults and young people can work positively together” Wilf Petherbridge, (Young Mayor of Lewisham, 2005/06)

Individually and collectively young people gain confidence, transferable skills and experience, and develop their commitment and responsibility to wider society by having recognised roles and responsibilities within such structures.

The leadership of the Young Mayor, a high profile, well-supported role that has real impact on mainstream policy, encourages and supports young people in Lewisham to feel involved and listened to.

- In 2011, 41.98% of young people in schools voted in the election of the Young Mayor; which represents 8076 young people.
- The Young Mayors project is a key contributory element of the borough’s overall strategy of engagement and involvement. For example, residents surveys have indicated that young people in Lewisham feel considerably more informed and involved than young people in equivalent boroughs.
- Youth participation has increased each year in a variety of community programmes and volunteering initiatives. There are some good examples of young people helping to shape projects at a local level for example, in the commissioning and evaluation of our Summer Activities and PAF Programmes.
- Lewisham’s third directly elected Young Mayor, Siobhan Bell, was elected in October 2006. she was the first Young Woman to be Elected as Young Mayor in the UK.
- Between 2007 and 2011 Young Advisors have Fringe Party Meetings or attended the major Political Party Conferences to discuss the Young Mayors Project and young people’s participation in local democracy and politics.
- The Young Mayor’s Budget has been spent in the following areas:
  - Textbook (Advice and Information for young people)
  - Albany Bandnite / RAR
  - Rehearsal Space
  - My Lewisham DVD
  - Youth Conference
  - Football Tournaments/ sports events
  - Block/ Community Parties
  - People’s Day Stage
  - Intergenerational work
  - Developing Young People’s Enterprise work
  - Young People’s Creative Enterprise
  - Website development and improving the image of young people
  - Media and events management for young people
  - Politics course to raise awareness and participation
  - Work with young women, seminars and role models
  - Work with young disabled people, social and integration.

In October 2007, the then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP, named Lewisham as an
The young people of Lewisham continue to take their place at the centre of the Council’s decision making processes, through the election of their 5th Young Mayor in 2008 with a turn out of 49%. This turn out represents a year on year increase in participation from 43% in 2006. Feedback from the Young Mayor and Advisors and the Young Managers’ Board is that they place great value on being involved in participation and they gain a great deal by being involved. In particular the opportunity to have their opinions heard and to influence and make sustainable decisions about things that affect them in the borough as well as the new experiences that being involved in participation has brought to them in terms of travel, meeting different people and developing their skills.

Consultations and input to policy development (examples)

- Youth Homelessness and Homelessness Forum, input into the production of handbook for young people and redesign of service provision.
- Safer Lewisham Partnership; consultation on violent extremism, Young People drugs strategy, Stop and search strategy, Youth Advisory Group (met police), safer neighbourhood panels, victim support group.
- Guardian Newspaper and London School of economics responses and research into the riots 2011
- Children and Young People’s Partnership Board; input into Children and Young Peoples Plan, Positive Activities Fund (PAF), Myplace, peer inspections.
- London Borough of Lewisham Communications Strategy – engaging with young people on developing a youth portal
- London Borough of Lewisham Customer Services Strategy
- London Borough of Lewisham Comprehensive Equalities Scheme (Lewisham Equalities Committee)
- Lewisham Sustainable Community Strategy
- Intergenerational Festival
- Libraries Commission and Library Services
- Electoral Services – appealing to young people/increasing engagement and voter registration
- Looked after Children and Leaving care team – supporting young people at the corporate parenting group and Children in Care Council
- Love Lewisham/ Love Clean Streets – environmental issues

4 London Borough of Lewisham Children and Young People’s Plan 2009-12.
London Borough of Lewisham Strategy for Parks, open spaces and swimming
Healthy Eating in schools
London Borough of Lewisham Teenage pregnancy strategy: working in schools/ peer education
Lewisham Local Assemblies; meetings and conferences

6. Lessons

- Creating a process of confidence building, fun and attractive joint activities, that allay peoples fears and concerns on all sides.
- Keeping things simple, straightforward and organic so that collaborative working is accentuated.
- Talking about and developing structures and mechanisms after the culture has been fostered that relate to the adult policy and political processes.
- Prioritise cooperation, collaboration and collectively whist avoiding de-legitimisation and differing agendas.
- Acknowledge and prioritise pluralism as an operating principle.
- Acknowledge that empowerment and self actualisation can create contradictions and tensions, hence the need for culture and consensus building.

7. Evidence

“In 2004 Lewisham’s elected Mayor introduced the country’s first Young Mayor – an innovation that other authorities are now following”. (Councillors Commission Report ‘representing the future’, Department for Communities and Local Government December 2007)5

“Lewisham’s Young Mayor’s project is a model for youth engagement across the country”. (Ed Milliband MP, Leader of the Labour Party)

"Lewisham is one of the local authorities leading the charge for empowering people and doing excellent work through its Young Mayor’s project”. (Hazel Blears MP, Former Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government)

“I think the Young Mayor of Lewisham is a great idea. It will give the young people a real say in the future of the area. We know the good things about living in Lewisham, and some of the things that need to be improved”. (Ian Wright, Former Arsenal and England footballer)

APA Children and young people are encouraged to participate in decision making and in supporting the community - progress in 2007-08

Elements of the Young Mayor and Young Advisers programme in 2007-08 included involvement locally in the Equalities audit, the Joint Area Review, the

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http://www.communities.gov.uk/councillorscommission/publications/representingthefuture/
Enhanced Youth Inspection, the Corporate Performance Assessment, the Mayoral commission, the Borough’s Transport Strategy, the annual Young People’s Conference and the Regeneration Strategy.

Nationally they participated in government and London wide organisations on the Aiming High launch, the Youth Cabinet at Downing Street, Good practice seminars at the Ministry of Justice, LBL’s own Empowerment beacon day, the GLA budgets, the GLA international Youth Conference, a conference on looked after children and the role of corporate parenting and an LCPCG event around knives, guns and gangs. The launch of the Guardian/LSE research into the London Riots 2011 and on going round table events with the Leader of the Labour group on a response and possible solutions to the London riots.

16th October 2007 Lewisham Corporate Assessment Report: Executive summary:

The Council gives top priority to and is especially strong at engaging young people. It has Beacon status for it. It has a well-supported and high-profile Young Mayor with a team of advisers, elected from youth centres, schools and other young people living in the Borough. The role has considerable influence on the Mayor and on mainstream Council policies as they affect young people. The Young Mayor not only achieves improved representation for young people but the role's high visibility and real influence encourages children and young people in feeling that active citizenship is worthwhile.

Further information:

www.b-involved.com
www.lewisham.gov.uk

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