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Summary of Engagement with Young Advisors Group for the Safer Stronger Communities Select Committee in-depth review into “How the Council embeds Equalities across its service delivery” – 9th December 2019

The Scrutiny Manager attended the Young Advisors meeting on the 9th December 2019 and gave an introduction to the Committee’s review. This was followed by an engagement session to get the views of those present facilitated by Jacob Sakil, Young Mayor Advisor Team.

Introduction given to the group:

A number of Councillors at Lewisham Council are carrying out an in-depth review into “How the Council embeds Equalities across its service provision”.

By Equalities we basically mean Fairness and making sure the Council’s own policies, the way it buys services, and the way it does the things that it needs to do, are fair to different people.

In particular when talking about Equalities, we refer to 9 characteristics that are protected in law by the Equalities Act 2010.

These are: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation.

In addition to these considerations there is another area that Councillors are more and more interested in which is “socio-economic disadvantage”. This sounds like a confusing term and lots of people misuse it. In fact it is usually defined as a range of things that can put you at an economic disadvantage regardless of any of the 9 factors listed above. It is similar to “poverty” but not the same. By Socio-economic disadvantage we mean things such as having: low or no wealth; low income; whether you live in a deprived area; if you are unable to afford basic needs such as food or heating; and what your socio-economic background is. I understand that many of you considered similar issues in your manifestoes and looked at why some groups might be effected by poverty in different ways. Some people talk about “period poverty” “food poverty” “fuel poverty” etc. The problem is still the same – poverty – but it might be experienced more acutely in different ways by different groups.

As I am sure you can image from thinking about yourself, your family and friends, many of us have lots of different parts to us so all these factors can’t be considered in isolation.

The Committee are keen to hear from you as young people in the borough on what you think are the important issues and we have some questions that we would like you to discuss.

Questions (through a workshop facilitated by Jacob Sakil):

Do you feel that people making decisions in the Council understand about your needs? What do they not understand? What do they get right?

“They understand but don’t care about changing.”

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“There is always an adult’s point of view”

“surveys are often not effective – just seems like consultation but not real”

“some views and needs seem to be less valid than others due to people’s biases and perceptions”

“Older people seemed biased. They think about their own childhood experiences rather than listening to the reality from young people today – it’s not the same now.”

“People in the Council seem to be older - they don’t seem to care about young people or young black people.”

“Austerity – the Council has not invested in Youth Services – people from poorer backgrounds and ethnic minorities are most affected by this.”

Have you personally or someone you are with ever been unable to access a service because of something you feel is unfair? ie. Closure of a community centre/ changes to parks

- *Do you have examples of things that help you be able to use services (ie. What helps you be able to use a leisure centre/park/youth provision) (This could be for example that there is a reduced rate for kids/a place feels safe/ there is access for wheel chairs/it is near a bus route/ taking part in the Young Mayors programme*
- *Do you have examples of where there are barriers for you or friends (ie. No equipment for your age group/all the facilities in the leisure centre not suiting you (maybe time of day of classes or for older people; the park not feeling safe; no access for wheelchairs etc.*

“Homelessness – a friend was refused help by SHIP as she didn’t meet the criteria of being pregnant”

“Access to counselling services – a friend couldn’t access and was told by a teacher that there was no support unless they were suicidal”

“A post-16 careers day at school – there was no facilities such as a hearing loop and a pupil with a hearing impairment was told they wouldn’t be able to attend”

“Youth clubs – limited access has a big impact on often marginalised young people.”

“An HIV positive friend felt nervous about accessing services and enrolling at university”

“Lewisham Shopping Centre - only 2 young people are able to enter shops at once and young people are not allowed to congregate. It is one of the main things to do in Lewisham centre and young people are not able to.”

“Downham Library – we were kicked out as a group of young people for being too noisy”

“Libraries not being quiet enough to do homework anymore. This is a barrier for people who particularly need them.”

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“lots of places not being Autism friendly meaning they are hard to use or access for some people.”

“brother told to leave the school as the school was unable to adapt to his needs as an Autistic child.”

- *What helped you to decide to be involved with the Young Advisors project?*

“Working together, meeting others, and having an opportunity to make a change.”

“a place to hear different opinions.”

“found the information online.”

“an opportunity to voice opinions in a safe space.”

“useful events such as hearing about the cadets.”

- *Do you know what barriers there are for other people who may have liked to but didn't?*

“it starts and end quite late for some people.”

“it should be showcased more. Don't hear enough about it”.

“people might not know about it.”

- *Is there anything else that you would like to highlight in terms of the Council that you feel would be of interest to the Committee's review?*