

# **An examination of youth councils as a tool for engaging with young people in a representative democracy**

**Julie Shirley**

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## Policy Briefing

A common ambition of local councils is to improve engagement with its community, particularly young people, and thoughts often turn to the creation of a youth council. This briefing is for the local council sector and summarises research into youth councils and reports on the 472 responses to a survey sent to 4,501 local councils in England and Wales. The aim of the document is to aid councils in deciding how to improve youth engagement. The research found that whilst democratic engagement through youth councils is a positive step to involve young people in democracy, there is a recurring theme that youth councils are not an effective solution. Some of the key findings from analysis of the responses included:

- 95% of local councils do not have a youth council
- 57% of respondents reported that their local council had no direct engagement with young people
- 54% of respondents were unaware of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
- 44% of respondents cited lack of resources as the reason for not having a youth council.

It is clear from NALC publications that local councils utilise a variety of methods to engage with young people, of which youth councils are just one aspect.

The British Youth Council also provides an excellent, albeit dated, guide for local councils setting up a youth council with a follow-up guide on supporting a youth council. This document lists barriers that can challenge the success of a youth council, one being that it is easier to do things without participation as it can be time-consuming and costly to ensure participation.

The public sector is experiencing ever-increasing demands on public services which take time and money, and encouraging participation from the community can drop down the list of priorities. It is not just young people that are hard to engage, councils also need to consider how they can reach all groups such as those experiencing language and cultural barriers. Expecting that people will go to the council website and read council minutes is unrealistic, councils need to promote an interest in democracy.

Setting up a youth council is not in itself the answer; adult-initiated projects can lead to young people taking action providing they are empowered and given the resources to act. This means adults letting go of the control of the activity which is often difficult if adults have the view that young people lack the experience to manage the activity.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) sets out that children and young people have the right to be heard when decisions are made that affect them. Councils need to recognise that all its decisions, including those relating to transport, housing, and environment, also affect young people and they should have the opportunity to express a view. Councils can recognise this right by embedding the UNCRC into its policies, as demonstrated by the Welsh Government. Young people may express their views differently but that does not make them less valid.

How then to give young people a voice if setting up a youth council is not the answer. Recent research has shown that young people have more online friends than face-to-face friends and would prefer to socialise online. As a result of this, young people lack connection to their communities and are less inclined to volunteer or contribute to their neighbourhood. Councils can utilise this knowledge by providing council updates in formats that all can access such as short video updates with subtitles. Having an active and engaging presence on social media is a relatively low-cost solution that would reach many groups of the community, not just young people.

Larger councils are more likely to have the resources to support the set-up of a youth council. However, before embarking on such a journey, councils should consider the following:

- Have young people requested a youth council?
- Will council appoint a relevantly-trained adult to support the youth council?
- Will the youth councillors be chosen by young people in the community e.g. elections?
- Will council allocate a budget to the youth council?
- Will council delegate authority to the youth council?
- Are all seats on the council filled?

If the answer is “no” to any of the above questions then research has shown that the venture is less likely to succeed.

Council may decide to setup other activities for young people to enjoy such as a youth club. However, councils should bear in mind that young people are less likely to socialise in person so a youth club or other social activities may not be the answer. Another impact on attendance at activities is the shift in the age that parents allow unsupervised play, previously an average of 9 years it is now an average of 11 years.

The research demonstrated that local councils are trying different methods to engage with and support young people. There is a lack of specific guidance aimed at encouraging the youth voice and this leads to the recommendations that have come out of the research:

- Review use of social media as a means to engage with the whole community
- Promote the importance of engaging young people in all areas of council activities
- Provide sector guidance on a range of ideas based on council size
- Stress the importance of carefully considering council's capacity for managing a youth council, taking into account resources such as budget, staff time, and appropriate adult support.

Councils need to tap into what is relevant to young people and show them that local councils and participating in democracy is relevant to them. Give young people a voice and show them how to use it. These are the leaders of the future.

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## Glossary

Children	Generally younger age children who do not have the understanding to make important decisions for themselves.
Councillor	An elected or co-opted representative of a Parish, Town or Community Council.
CRAE	Children's Rights Alliance for England
DLUHC	Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
Local Council	Parish, Town or Community Council in England
Local Councillor	A representative of a Parish, Town or Community Council.
Local Government Association	Politically-led, cross-party organisation that works on behalf of principal authorities.
Member	An elected or co-opted representative of a Parish, Town or Community Council.
MHCLG	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
MP	Member of Parliament
NALC	National Association of Local Councils; represents Parish, Town and Community Councils in England and Wales.
OFCOM	Communications regulator in the UK.
ONS	Office for National Statistics
Principal Authority	County, District, Borough or Unitary Councils.
SLCC	Society of Local Council Clerks
UNCRC	United Nations Convention Rights of the Child
Young people	Older or more experienced children who are more likely to be able to make decisions for themselves.

# 1. Introduction

Parish, Town and Community councils form the tier of government closest to the people, governed by local people representing the needs and wants of their communities and advocating on their behalf. This is done through a system of representative democracy based on elections. The notion being that those elected to govern act in the name of the people (Kingdom, 2014). The people have the control to remove those elected through the electoral system and put in power those that represent their views. It is a guiding principle that councillors have a duty to the whole local community, with a special duty to their own constituents including those who did not vote for them (Widdicombe, 1986). This duty includes representing young people and listening to their views, particularly in matters that will affect them (UNCRC, 1989).

There are many ways a local council can support children and young people, from youth clubs, holiday activities, play park provision, to giving young people a voice through youth councils and forums. There are resources available for local councils on how to encourage and interact with young people (LGA, 2012; NALC, undated; NALC, 2021). In one guide, it states that *“Young people are the future of our communities, and supporting their development and livelihood is paramount to the growth of local (parish and town) councils”* (NALC, 2022). Nonetheless, local councils often find it hard to engage with this demographic (Freechild Institute, 2022).

Youth engagement is a broad term and the various activities can be grouped into three main themes:

1. Youth provision – providing young people with activities, recreation facilities, to keep them active and discourage them from becoming bored which could potentially result in anti-social behaviour.
2. Youth consultation – finding out what young people want.
3. Youth participation – giving young people an equal voice to influence public decision-making through youth councils or forums.

Providing young people with play parks and sports facilities is a standard duty<sup>1</sup> of local councils, and can involve applications for grant funding to provide improved facilities.

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<sup>1</sup> Local Govt (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 s 19

This includes consulting with young people to confirm the types of equipment they would like in their play parks and such like. However, youth participation is a growing area, as a society we are moving forward from the “seen and not heard” ethos of the Victorian era. Whilst the number of youth councils appears to be on the increase (Joseph, 1984 and Matthews, 2001), research shows that just five per cent of local councils have a youth council. The main aim of the research is to examine the success of youth councils as a method for representing young people, and whether the lack of youth councils is a signal that local councils have found more successful ways to engage with the younger demographic. Through research, the author hopes to establish:

- common factors that result in the success of a youth council
- how youth councils contribute to decision-making
- reasons for lack of youth councils
- alternative methods of youth participation in place of youth councils.

The research methodology chosen will incorporate a mixture of primary and secondary research. The author conducted a preliminary literature review (secondary research) before carrying out primary research by surveying 47% of the local councils in England and Wales. The methodology will be covered in more depth at Chapter 3.

The author is an employed parish clerk in Gloucestershire at a new council that is passionate about youth participation. The author found there was little up-to-date guidance on successfully engaging with young people, and guidance specifically on youth councils was over a decade old. There have been previous studies on youth councils which will be explored in the next chapter. These studies have indicated that whilst democratic engagement with young people is a good thing, there is a consistent theme that youth councils are not working effectively.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Representative Democracy**

The UK is governed by a system of representative democracy based on elections with the underlying principle that those elected to govern represent everyone and act in the name of the people. This is a familiar model across the modern world; it is derived from the ancient Greek system that had a more direct democracy, although one which excluded foreigners, slaves and women (Alonso et al, 2011). Somewhat similarly, women and some men were excluded from voting in the UK until 1918 when the Representation of the People Act 1918 was enacted. Whilst being called the “Representation of the People”, it still stopped short of universal suffrage; women could not vote until they reached the age of 30 years old whilst men could vote from 21 years of age. This inequality remained until 1928 when women were permitted the vote from age 21. Eventually, in 1969, the voting age was reduced to 18 years for both men and women. There is a campaign to further reduce the voting age to 16 years which has seen some success in Wales, yet it has not been successful nationally.

The nature of representative democracy requires that people use their vote to reflect their attitudes and have a say in who represents them in government. However, whilst 67% of those eligible to vote did so in the last UK General Election in 2019, only 35.9% in 2021 voted in the local government elections. These relatively low-levels of participation are indicative of a widespread issue that shows a disengagement with politics. There are a number of factors that have led to young people being less interested in democratic norms. Research has shown there is a strong correlation between increased use of socialising online and a detachment from democratic norms (Onward, 2022). In the 2019 General Election, the statistics show that the older the voter, the higher the turnout, with 78% of people over the age of 65 years exercising their right to vote, compared to 54% of people between the ages of 18 and 24 years (Uberoi, 2023).

The next local elections are in 2023 and the voting age in Wales has been lowered to 16 years for local and Welsh Parliament elections, but not in England. An interesting point of inequality to note is that whilst Wales have extended the vote to 16 year olds, they cannot stand for election at local government until the age of 18. The forthcoming

elections see the implementation of the requirement for voters to produce photo identification, brought about by the Elections Act 2022. Photo identification such as pensioner travel cards will be accepted whilst student cards will not. It would seem paradoxical that the voting age is reduced to encourage participation in the voting system whilst also introducing an Act that organisations have argued will make it harder for young people to vote, already an area where there is reduced voter turnout. In addition to affecting young people, those on lower incomes and ethnic minorities will be impacted by the changes (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2022).

Voting for one's representatives is of course important however, Alonso (2011) recognises that democracy is an accessory to representation and that citizens do not truly participate in decision-making beyond the voting booth. This leads to an informal domain of participation through political judgement (Alonso, 2011) where freedom of speech and political pressure leads to those elected to represent in a manner so as to remain voted in office.

This section has reviewed the progress of representative democracy and leads us to consider what more can be done to participate in democracy. We also need to ensure that those under the age of 18 years are fully represented. The next section will discuss participation leading to a consideration of youth councils.

## **2.2 Participation**

Local government is more akin to direct democracy than central government where members of the public have direct access to their local councillors through attendance at council meetings. Local councils allow the public to address the council on the topics for debate, thus allowing a limited amount of participation. In England, this process requires citizens to attend their local council meeting in person where they are allowed a small segment of time (typically 15 minutes shared with other attendees) to speak. Wales has legalised hybrid meetings permitting councillors and citizens to attend remotely to take part in the decision-making process which strengthens the ability to participate. However, citizen engagement remains a challenge to elected representatives (Sweeting and Copus, 2012); particularly when their political party may dictate how its members should vote on policy matters, despite what the local citizens express in their interactions with local councillors.

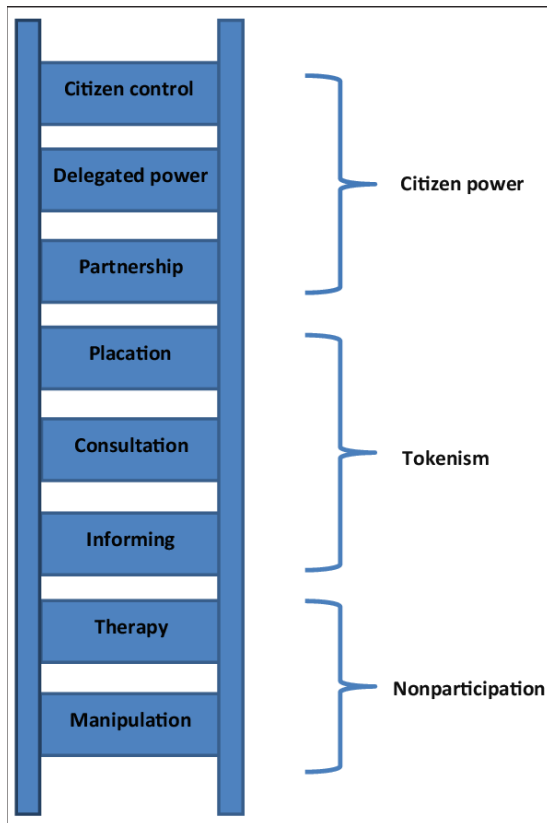


Figure 1 Arnstein's (1969) 'ladder of participation'.

Turning now to the theory of public participation, an area that has become essential to the delivery of public services. Finding ways to involve citizens in decision-making has developed through a move away from representative democracy towards participatory democracy (Carpenter, 2008). Arnstein's 'ladder of public participation' (1969) explores how citizen participation in government can affect the perception of good governance. The further up the ladder the more desirable forms of participation, with delegated power and citizen control at the top of the ladder. Genuine participation is achieved through citizen power: partnership, delegated power and citizen control. Often,

citizens are consulted to give them a voice and hear their views however this can be tokenistic and consultations do not reach some groups in the community (Carpenter, 2008). Utilising different approaches to reach hard-to-engage groups takes time and resources (Carpenter, 2008). In terms of delivering public services, time and resources are in short supply and the demands to achieve good value can conflict with citizen participation.

It is generally recognised that citizens lack the power to ensure their views will be observed (Arnstein, 2019) and the opportunity to flex any power in local government is limited to the ballot box. This leads us to consider how young people, who have no voting rights, ensure their voice is heard by the local councils. Lansdown (2001) provides a concise list of characteristics for effective and genuine participation – these characteristics can be applied to any youth-focused activity, not just youth councils. Top of the list is being prepared to listen to young people's priorities - all too often councils priorities are not the same as children's and young people. For example, the council may want to know what play equipment young people want, but perhaps with a growing interest in the environment and climate change, children and young people want to be involved in those discussions too. Young people express their views

differently but that does not make them less valid. The environmental movement “School Strike for Climate” initiated by Greta Thunberg in 2018 aged 15 demonstrated that thousands of young people worldwide had strong views on climate change (Fridays for Future, 2023).



Figure 2 Adapted from Ladder of Young People's Participation (Hart, 1992)

A review of Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation (1992) shows us that Rung 8 (see Figure 2) would be considered best practice but we see that participation begins at rung 6: adult-initiated, shared decisions with young people (Hart,

1992). Activities that start as adult-initiated can lead to children taking action once the activity is underway (Lansdown, 2001). There is a risk of using tokenism (Hart, 1992) when involving young people in participation. This is where young people appear to have been given a voice but adult disregard of the views can lead to distrust in the local council and a sense of apathy in getting involved again. Tokenism negatively shapes the development of the child despite good intentions to protect from adulthood (Warming, 2011).

However, there is debate about participation and the effects on young people. One argument is that young people lack capability to participate and need to be shielded from adult matters (Matthews and Limb, 1998). The view that young people are little more than 'adults-in-waiting' (Mathews and Limb, 1998) should be challenged; young people today have access to a world of information via social media and the internet that shapes their opinions. James and Prout (1990) rightly questioned this view as being a social construct that has been designed to exclude young people from taking an active part in society. The legislative system adds to that view by preventing young people from taking part in voting at elections and thus shaping their futures (Matthews and Limb, 1998). As children grow they progressively develop the capacity to participate in environmental matters from age 6 upwards (Hart 1997 cited in Matthews



and Limb 1998). This capacity can be developed into making decisions about their futures.

Regardless of the debate for and against participation of young people, recent research demonstrates that young people have become more detached from democratic-norms (Onward, 2022) and more likely to support an authoritarian system of governance. UK-based Think Tank, Onward, found four compelling arguments for the detachment; these include narrowing social networks, overprotective parenting, the increased pressure of modern work, and the “always online” culture. Young people spend over four hours a day on social media and have more online friends than real. These factors have led to a lack of connection with their communities and they are less likely to volunteer or contribute to their neighbourhood (Onward, 2022). Parents are less inclined to allow their children to play unsupervised below the age of 11 years, a rise from the average age of 9 years within the last generation (Onward, 2022). These factors have a direct impact on young people’s social development and in turn on their views of democracy (Onward, 2022). The next section considers how to encourage participation of young people in local government through youth councils.

## **2.3 Youth Councils**

It is *“unrealistic to expect them (children) suddenly to become responsible, participating adult citizens at the age of 16, 18, or 21 without prior exposure to the skills and responsibilities involved”* (Hart, 1992, p5). One solution for encouraging youth participation and teaching the skills for democracy is the setting up of youth councils. Young voices would have a unique perspective on creative problem-solving leading to change at the local level (LGA, 2012, p15).

Children and young people have the right to be heard when decisions are made that affect them (UNCRC, 1989). This right was set down in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child and was the first time in international law that the rights of children were acknowledged. However, Article 12 alone does not give the young person autonomy in decision-making but does move society forward from the view that children are ‘seen and not heard’. The responsibility remains with adults to ensure that children are encouraged to participate and express viewpoints (Lansdown, 2001).

Local councils have often sought the views of young people on matters that directly affect them such as the type of equipment installed in a playground, and this is an important aspect of council services. However, it should be recognised that all decisions made by local councils, including those relating to transport, housing, environment, also affect young people and they should have the opportunity to express a view. Taking housing as an example, a development site for 2,500 homes can take upwards of 10 years from initial planning application to build-out (MHCLG, 2018). Young people are not specifically consulted on planning applications for new homes despite the likelihood that they will be living in them in the future. This could be accomplished through the involvement of youth councils.

There is guidance from NALC on how a youth council can be created and managed. One Voice Wales also publish useful guidance which includes practical tips. But despite having sector-specific guidance, a recent study published by the SLCC (2023) of English and Welsh local councils shows that just 5% of local councils reported having a youth council. There is a question on how the other 95% are involving the participation of young people. Equally important is the question as to why more councils do not have a youth council.

Adults often create youth councils as an opportunity to engage with young people, rather than a demand from young people to have a voice (Matthews, 2001). Youth councils have been around for decades; in 1949, there were 240 youth councils which fell into decline through a lack of common purpose between the adults and the young people (Joseph, 1984 cited in Matthews, 2001). There was renewed interest in the mid-1980s to promote youth participation in decision-making (Matthews, 2001). A survey in 1999 showed there were over 400 youth councils, with national youth agencies providing guidance on request but lacked capacity to support development. Matthews' (2001) research found that the growth of youth councils has been rather haphazard, perhaps lacking a national commitment from the UK Government to support the youth voice. The international treaty monitoring committee of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child scrutinised the UK government in 2002 for compliance to the charter. The report found a failure "*to systematically implement the Convention in law, policy and practice*" (CRAE, 2002 cited in Matthews and Limb, 2003).

As of 2022, the UK Government had still not implemented the UNCRC into law. A survey by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport resulted in a renewed commitment from the Government to “*strive to develop innovative approaches which reach more young people and embed youth engagement across government*” (Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2022). The Welsh Government has already embedded youth engagement into government by adopting the UNCRC as a basis for all its work with children and young people. It has also legislated youth engagement with the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 making it possible for a local council to appoint up to 2 youth representatives (aged 16-25) to participate in the work of the council. The CRAE (2002) report acknowledged that at the local level more progress had been made with initiatives that “*promote participative democratic structures that engage children and young people*” (Matthews and Limb, 2003, p174). Unfortunately, without formal legislation, the local efforts will continue to be ad-hoc.

## 2.4 Types of Youth Council

Matthews (2000) conducted a detailed review of youth councils and identified different types of youth council. The conceptual classifications remain relevant in today's society, particularly with the types of structures used for youth councils. These were mainly local authority-led or youth-based organisation led. The two types of lead organisation all used three types of structures for their youth councils in how the council was formed:

- Feeder Organisations: linked to an adult decision-making structure, they feed into and contribute to strategies.
- Shadow Organisation: often mimic the structure of an adult decision-making structure and run in parallel. Range in size from shadow parish council to shadow county council. Shadow parish councils can lead to the formation of a county-wide youth council (such as seen in Hampshire) (Matthews and Limb, 1998).
- Consultative Organisations: strong local focus with a purpose to secure resources to develop the local area.

Within each of the three types, they can further be described as:

- Issue-specific where the group is created in response to a specific matter, e.g. setup by the health authority or police.

- Group-specific where the young people share a common interest, e.g. Young Farmers Club (ages 10-28).

Young people initiated organisations running independently of an adult-based structure were considered less common in the 1990s (Matthews and Limb, 1998). These types of structure are started and setup by young people, often in response to a campaign, and set their own agendas. One such example is the Fridays for Future movement, founded by Greta Thunberg. More recent research identified that young activists have attempted to work through conventional youth engagement programs but found that youth councils were too constrained and lacked genuine participation (Taft and Gordon, 2013). Young people realised that working independently of adults gave them more freedom to act and initiate change.

The creation of youth councils gives the impression that the originating organisation is empowering young people and as Matthews' notes (1998) it lends legitimacy to the decisions of the adults. For successful youth participation, thought needs to be given to the setting of youth council meetings. Meeting in the council chamber may be intimidating for some groups, but others may request such a venue to add gravitas to their meetings. Attendance levels will also be affected by the meeting times as they can clash with other extra-curricular activities. Recognition should also be made that young people serving on youth councils are more likely to have other activities and may be able to participate for a limited time. As such, high-turnover of youth councillors is to be expected (Matthews, 2001). Inappropriate levels of adult interference in the proceedings will also undermine the process. Matthews (2001) sampled some youth councils and noted that adult participation could disempower young people. One reason why adults over-involve themselves in youth councils is that adults may feel that children do not have the skills and training to participate fully in a youth council. The answer then lies in providing training rather than risk becoming undermining the participative effect of youth councils.

Schools frequently setup a school council made up of young people across the school. It has been argued that for successful participation school councils need "*spaces provided that enable pupils to voice their concerns to an audience that can influence decisions*" (Lundy, 2007, p. 933). This is a useful attitude for all youth councils. There

are two immediate benefits to a school council: influence decisions but also teaching young people about the power of participating in democracy.

However, social values will also need to be changed for local decision-making structures to succeed (Matthews, 2001). The idea that young people are citizens in training and youth councils are methods to practice democracy suggests that any impact on policy is irrelevant thus undermining the participative benefits that could be attained through youth councils (Taft and Gordon, 2013). The social construct that children are passive in shaping their futures will ultimately prevent true participation.

## **2.5 Summary**

In conclusion, democratic engagement would indicate that youth councils are a positive step to involve young people in democracy. Nevertheless, there is a consistent theme that youth councils are not working effectively. Enabling young people to participate can mean adults relinquishing power (Matthews, 2001) and creating structures that challenge the authority. Trained youth workers can support the process and there are good examples where youth councils supported by youth workers have led to very successful youth forums, such as Stroud Youth Voice (Stroud District Council, 2023). The next chapter outlines the research methodology used to explore themes where youth councils have been successful.

### 3. Research Methodology

In this chapter, the research methodology will be explained plus a description of how the chosen research methods met the aims and objectives. This is in order to address the question of how successful youth councils are as a tool for engaging with young people in a representative democracy.

#### 3.1 Primary Research

Primary research is the collation of new information: *“Primary sources are your raw materials. They are the subject of your research, part of the evidence base itself, rather than sources you draw on to throw light on your own findings”* (Cottrell, 2014). Primary research can be gained through observation, participation, measurement and interrogation (Walliman, 2014). The next section talks in detail about the survey used in the primary research and the reasons behind the different data measures utilised.

##### 3.1.1 Survey

An online survey of 33 questions (see Appendix A) was created to collect data:

- On the number of local councils in England and Wales currently with a youth council, data is used to compare with secondary research to examine trends in the growth or decline of youth councils.
- On the number of local councils in England and Wales that have had an active youth council in the past 10 years, if not still in operation.
- To identify how youth councils contribute to the decision-making process of local councils as a measure of participatory democracy.
- To compare the size of council against the existence of a youth council, for example does a larger council increase capacity to facilitate a youth council.
- To identify reasons that local councils do not have youth councils, which may reveal alternative methods of youth engagement utilised.
- To identify common factors that make for a successful youth council.

In order to further analyse reasons for youth council success, the survey included questions on areas that the British Youth Council (BYC, 2010) considers important for a successful youth council, such as:

- Budgetary control
- Delegated authority

- Nominated adult to support the youth council
- Requirement for youth council elections.

The research survey also included a question specifically to assess recognition of Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Whilst participatory democracy is becoming more usual for local councils to engage with adult service-users as one way of increasing public value (Horner and Hazel, 2005 cited in O'Flynn, 2007), it is perhaps not as usual for local councils to engage with young people, maybe overlooking or being unaware of the UNCRC Article 12 and the implication for local councils.

### **3.1.2 Design**

Microsoft Forms was chosen as the platform for the survey as it is free to use, customisable and easily accessible for participants. It was also possible to design the survey so that respondents were presented with a relevant set of questions based on them having a youth council. The collected data could be downloaded into a CSV format file for analysing. The survey was central to the collection of primary data and went through several revisions and was piloted by colleagues before finalising.

The survey was anonymous, although some clerks did email separately to request receipt of the final report, the contact details were not linked to their survey responses. Ensuring the data was anonymous protected the participants as they are paid council staff and may feel uncomfortable commenting on the activities of their councils. The survey contained a mixture of both qualitative and quantitative data questions with mostly tick-box responses so that it could be completed easily to encourage responses. There was also the option where the respondent could enter a free text answer, producing qualitative data that can provide some more context particularly around the role that youth councils play and possible reasons for lack of a youth council. To further encourage responses, the survey was sent by email which fully explained the reasoning behind the survey and also an estimate of the time it would take to complete.

### **3.1.3 Distribution**

The survey was distributed as follows:

- Direct email to approximately 4,500 (47%) of precepting local councils in England and Wales. The mailing list was collated from local council contact

details published in downloadable .csv format on principal authority websites that subscribe to the Civica / Modern.gov software.

- Via the Society of Local Council Clerks website for its members. There was potential for duplication but unlikely that anyone would choose to duplicate their responses.
- A link to the survey was also provided on a private Facebook Group for local council clerks to increase exposure to the survey. Again there was potential for duplication, but the intention was to increase exposure to prompt clerks to respond to the survey.

Of the 4,501 councils emailed, 88 emails were rejected as spam messages.

### **3.2 Ethical considerations**

It was important to ensure that no one taking part in this research project came to any harm therefore De Montfort University's ethics committee approved the research following the University's *Research Ethics Code of Practice* (De Montfort University, 2021).

All participants were informed of the purpose of the survey and provided with an information sheet (see Appendix B) which also contained the consent parameters. The survey started with the consent questions and did not allow the participant to proceed onto the main section of the survey if they did not agree to take part. The survey did not request any confidential information and gathered mostly information that is in the public domain. Whilst respondents could share personal opinions, these would be anonymous, therefore overall it was considered to be a low-risk study. Data collected has been stored securely on a password-protected account and will be destroyed 12 months after collection.

### **3.3 Secondary research**

For secondary research, the researcher reviewed literature and information already produced by other people including (but not restricted to) papers written by academics, local authorities and the National Association of Local Councils (see Chapter 2).



### **3.4 Data Collection and Analysis**

The results were downloaded into a CSV format file and imported into Microsoft Excel to collate the information and analyse the data. It was intended to use statistics software IBM SPSS however, due to the low numbers of youth council data it was problematic in the analysis of the data. The free text responses were grouped into themes and were analysed alongside the other responses using Microsoft Excel.

### **3.5 Limitations**

The unfamiliarity of the IBM SPSS analysis software was time-consuming to overcome, although it is a very useful package when there are a large number of survey responses to analyse. The software would have been particularly useful in analysing correlations between variables had there been a larger quantity of youth councils recorded. With more time, it would have been useful to extend the survey to principal authorities to compare the prevalence of youth councils in the local council sector against the principal authority sector. It would also have been useful to collect data on how the youth council budgets compared to the budgets of other council services.

Another area that would be useful to study is the link between areas of deprivation and the attendance levels of youth programmes. Augsberger et al (2018) found that whilst the youth councils they studied represented diverse youth there was a discrepancy in regard to education and those at academically high-achieving schools were more likely to serve on the youth council. This would be an area worthy of future study that would provide significant guidance to local councils.

There was a risk of potential bias; those with an interest in youth councils are more likely to respond. The covering email included a prominent message to invite all to participate even if they have no experience of youth councils. There was also an element of self-selection bias; the respondents had a choice whether or not to participate in the survey, resulting in the final sample not being representative of the population. However, the larger sample size chosen reduced the margin of error, and the results will show that those without youth councils were not put off from completing the survey. Additionally, the survey was in the main responded to by clerks but was not about them personally but about their councils.

### **3.6 Summary**

The research methodology chosen has been explained in this chapter and justified in order to identify the success of youth councils as a tool for engaging with young people in a representative democracy. There were limitations to the research which, with hindsight, would have improved the significance of the research findings. However, as can be seen in the next chapter, the primary research has provided a good range of data which will benefit local councils in making decisions about how to represent its young people.

## **4. Survey Results and Analysis**

In this chapter, the results and analysis of the primary research are presented. It will also link back to the literature review and draw comparisons with the primary research.

### **4.1 Response rate and profile**

There are a total of 9,616 precepting local councils in England and Wales (DLUHC, 2022 and StatsWales, 2022). The questionnaire was sent by email to 4,501 councils in England and Wales in January 2023, which equates to 47%. An initial deadline of 3<sup>rd</sup> February was set and this was extended to 12<sup>th</sup> February at the request of the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) to allow publication of the survey on its website. Of the 4,501 91% were English local councils and 9% were in Wales.

A total of 474 responses was received, 2 of which did not consent to the survey, resulting in a 10% response rate. This is a large survey when compared to other sector surveys, for example the SLCC Future of Local Councils surveyed all local councils, and received 591 responses (SLCC, 2023). The youth council survey was sent once, with a link provided on a private Facebook group of local council clerks and the SLCC website to raise the profile of the survey. Appendix C shows the distribution of councils across England and Wales that were sent the survey, Appendix D shows the responses across the two countries – this map also shows the distribution of youth councils that were reported in the responses. Naturally, the majority of the respondents were based in England (92%) compared to Wales (8%), see Figures 3 and 4 on the next page.

The first section of the survey established some facts about the council, such as the number of seats on the council and the level of annual income. Forty per cent of respondents were from councils with less than £25,000 annual income. This compares to 63% of local councils that have a precept of £25,000 or less (DLUHC, 2022). Figure 5 shows the distribution of responses by annual income.

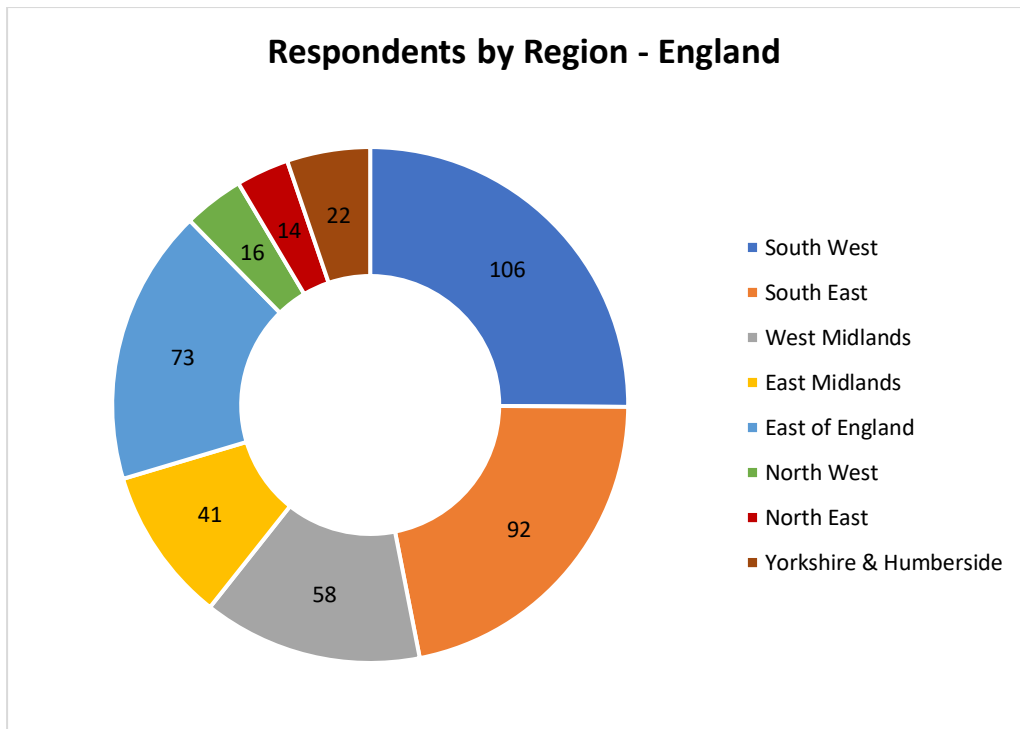


Figure 3 Respondents by Region - England

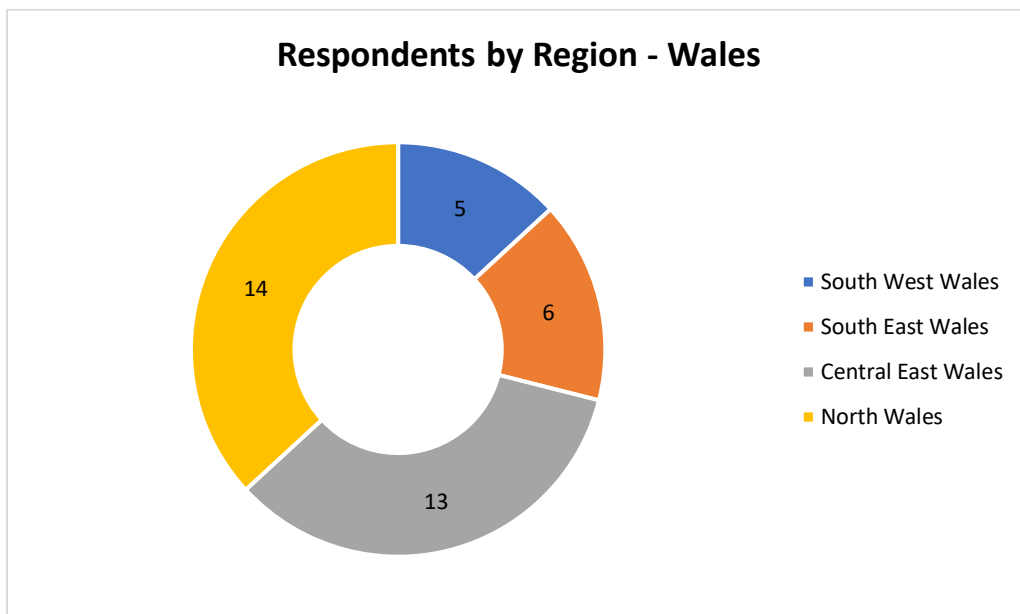


Figure 4 Respondents by Region - Wales

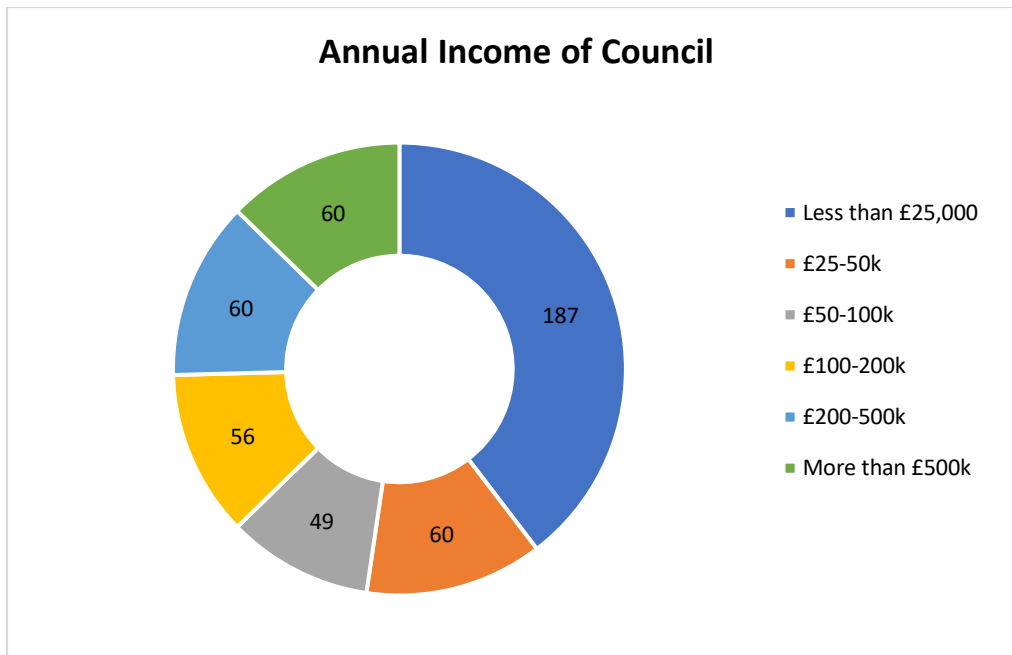


Figure 5 Response rate by council annual income

## 4.2 Research Findings

At the time of the survey, 25% of the local councils were 100% elected, with 73% of those councils carrying no vacancies. An analysis of those local councils with a youth council shows that 17 out of the 23 were carrying no vacancies. This could indicate that communities with a keen interest in local government have the potential to establish a youth council.

The survey also collected information on social media presence to measure if this is an effective tool to reach young people. The survey found that local councils use Facebook (70%) and Twitter (17%) to interact with their residents. However, in a survey conducted by Ofcom in 2021, it found that young people of all ages commonly accessed YouTube closely followed by TikTok and Instagram, then Facebook and Snapchat. Understanding how young people use social media could help local councils tailor their social media presence to reach a larger audience leading to a greater engagement. The social media presence of the youth councils was also analysed, and despite the Ofcom survey setting out that Facebook was the 4<sup>th</sup> place favourite, the youth councils mainly used Facebook (35%) and Instagram (21%). The Future of Local Councils report (SLCC, 2023) recommends that local councils evaluate its use of social media as a tool to reach the community. Having an active and

engaging presence on social media is a relatively low-cost solution that would reach many groups of the community, not just young people.

*Recommendation #1: Review use of social media as a means to engage with the community.*

#### **4.2.1 The first aim of the survey was to measure the number of local councils in England and Wales that currently have a youth council**

Question 14 asked if the council currently has a youth council. Twenty-three answered yes, whilst the remaining 449 answered no. Those with a youth council equated to 4.8% which is consistent with the research findings in “The Future of Local Councils” (SLCC, 2023) that found 5% of participants reported having a youth council. Thirteen per cent of the youth councils are based in Wales, the other 87% are in England.

Youth councillor age ranges spanned from under-10s to 25 years old. Mostly, youth councils were provided for the 10-16 age range. Given that parents are less likely to allow their children to play unsupervised below the age of 11 years (Onward, 2022), it is probable that involvement in youth councils for the younger age groups will require adult-assistance to attend the youth council meetings. This will have a bearing on attendance levels.

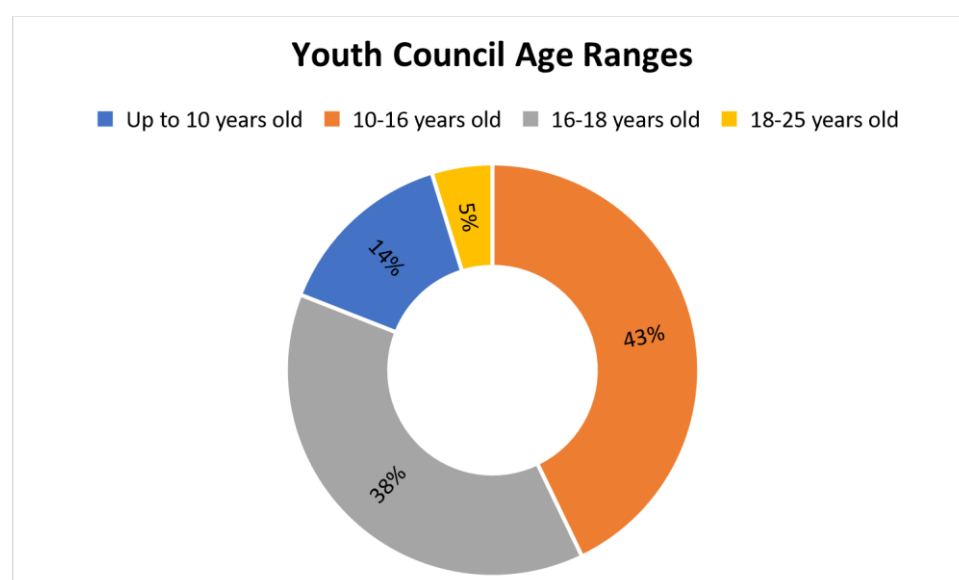


Figure 6 Youth Council Age Ranges

#### **4.2.2 The number of local councils in England and Wales that have had an active youth council in the past 10 years**

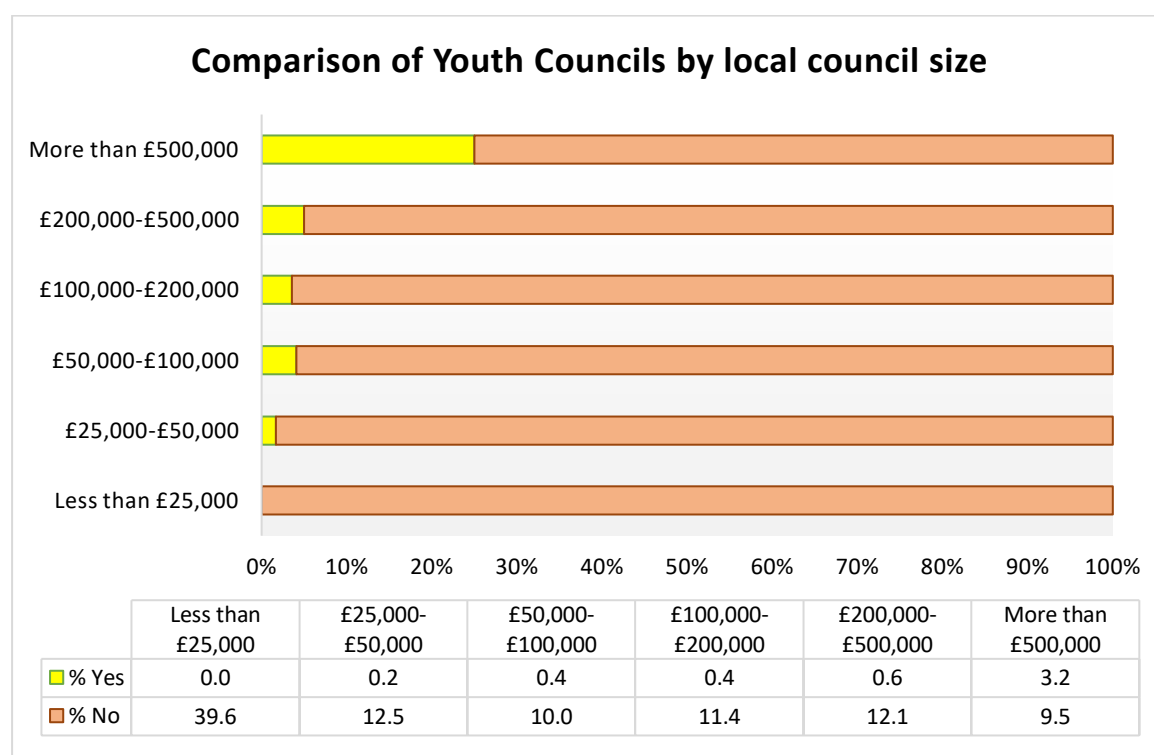
The survey also collected data for those that have had a youth council in the past but was no longer active. Twenty-six (5.8%) had a youth council in the past, 18 of them ceased in the past 12 years. The researcher chose 12 years as the limit to measure, as this would coincide with youth service cuts experienced since the Coalition Government took power in 2010 (Unison, 2019). Unison found that between 2010 and 2016, local authority youth services in the UK were cut by £387 million; this would have had a huge impact on local councils attempting to fill the gaps in youth provision left by the principal authorities.

When asked for a summary of the reasons why the youth councils ended 58% cited difficulty in retaining members. This is unsurprising given that 41% overall of respondents noted their local council was carrying vacancies. Thirty per cent cited resource issues in terms of finances and staff time as a reason for being unable to continue to support a youth council. One respondent noted that a lack of understanding between the youth council and local council created friction; the local council felt that the young people were asking for too many things that the council had neither the finances nor the power to deliver. This is a common issue as noted by Matthews (2003) which could be alleviated by allocating a budget to the youth council and setting clear parameters.

#### **4.2.3 Comparing this data against secondary research to examine trends in the growth or decline of youth councils**

In 1949, there were 240 youth councils recorded (Matthews, 2001), 400 in 1999 and 620 in 2016 (BYC, 2023). The prevalence of youth councils across the UK has changed over time but generally showing an increase. However, the data from 2016 includes youth councils from all levels of local government, not just local councils. A review of the British Youth Council member list showed few at the local level. Question 19 asked participants to indicate membership of national youth organisations with only 2 of the 23 with youth councils indicating they hold membership of the British Youth Council, and 1 was a member of National Youth Agency. Given there are 9,616 local councils across England and Wales, an uncertain extrapolation that 5% of local councils have youth councils indicate there are 480 youth councils at the local council level.

Of the 23 youth councils, 7 of them have been established for 5+ years, and 6 of those belonged to local councils that received an annual income greater than £500,000. Figure 7 below shows the comparison of youth councils by local council size, in terms of annual income. Just two youth councils were supported by a youth worker, the others were supported by other members of staff such as the Clerk and / or supported by nominated councillors. The small sample of youth councils does not lead to any definitive results in the success criteria for a youth council but certainly the larger size of the local council allows the resources to provide a youth council budget and dedicated adult support.



*Figure 7 Number of Youth Councils by local council income*

#### **4.2.4 Identify how youth councils contribute to the decision-making process of local councils as a measure of participatory democracy**

Question 23 asked in which areas of council business did the youth councils involve themselves. The table below shows the breakdown of responses:



<b>Table 1: Youth Councils Business</b>	<b>Number</b>
Set own local projects, eg local action on climate change	20
Youth specific activities, eg youth club, events, recreation	16
Involved in the parish / town council decisions	12
Set own national projects eg campaigning to reduce voting age	2
Other (eg Town Plan Consultations, discussion groups)	2

It would be interesting to explore the types of projects selected by the youth councils and how those topics align with national targets, e.g. climate action. In one example, the local council had two youth representatives sit on the full council and they offered views on all business of the local council. This allowed direct participation of the representatives by feeding in the views of the youth community. It should be noted though that whilst the youth council offers the ability to contribute to the decision-making process of the local council, it is not necessarily representative of all young people in the community. This is particularly true when the youth councillors have volunteered or been selected by adults. A truer representation would be gained through youth elections.

#### **4.2.5 Compare the size of council against the existence of a youth council, for example does a larger council increase capacity to facilitate a youth council**

It is fair to say that a natural assumption is that a larger council (in terms of annual income) would have the resources to facilitate a youth council. The data confirms that larger councils are more likely to have a youth council, with 65% of youth councils being at councils with an income of more than £500,000. However in one instance, it is a modest-sized council with £100-200,000 annual income that allocated the largest youth budget. The majority of councils without a youth council have an annual income of less than £25,000 (40%) compared to those over £500,000 (10%) which indicates that larger councils are more likely able to facilitate a youth council.

#### **4.2.6 Identify reasons why local councils do not have youth councils, which may reveal alternative methods of youth engagement utilised**

A commonly cited reason for not having a youth council is that the local council is too small and the parish has few young people. It was also noted that smaller parishes can have access to good youth provision in a neighbouring larger parish. Interestingly,

several of the Welsh respondents had taken up the power<sup>2</sup> to appoint two youth representatives onto their local council and utilised this method to engage and represent young people.

One response “*Youth Councils are more effort than they return*” identified an issue experienced by many that can also be true of other council services. Children and young people aged 0-19 years account for 23% of the whole population of the UK (Association of Young People’s Health, 2023), compared to 13% of those aged 70 and over. It is important that the profile of engaging with young people is increased with local councils. This fits with one of the recommendations of the Future of Local Councils (SLCC, 2023) that local councils should review its engagement of young people.

*Recommendation #2: highlight the importance of engaging young people in all areas of council activities.*

The table below shows the reasons for the lack of youth councils, and the lack of resources such as time, budget, staff availability was the main cited reason.

<b>Table 2: Reasons for No Youth Council</b>	<b>Number</b>
Lack of resources (staff, time, budget)	175
Other organisations run youth activities	110
Council working on other priorities	108
Difficult to recruit youth councillors	101
Council runs other youth activities	31
Other (range of reasons)	172

*Recommendation #3: provide sector guidance on a range of ideas based on council size.*

When asked how the council engages with young people, 34% of participants reported that they went via the local schools, followed by consultations specifically for young people (20%), then consultations via adults (13%). Whilst utilising the schools to engage with young people is a useful method, it excludes those that are in alternative provision such as home schooling (Augsberger et al, 2018).

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<sup>2</sup> Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011

Social media was described by 21 respondents (4.5%) as its main method of engaging with young people, and 2.5% identified that they engage through youth forums to give young people a voice.

As common with local councils, 25% of participants categorised their council's youth engagement as "providing young people with activities, recreation and sports facilities". More than half of all respondents (57%) classified their youth engagement as having "no direct engagement" with young people.

One of the final questions of the survey gave respondents the opportunity to summarise their youth engagement in a free text response. There were 356 responses which were grouped by common theme into the following areas:

<b>Table 3: Youth engagement themes</b>	<b>Number</b>
No engagement	136
Via Schools	65
Youth clubs	35
Play areas	28
Third Party organisations	25
Events	24
Social Media	21
Youth Council	21
Grant funding	17
Surveys	13
Sports activities	10
Youth Representatives	10
Detached Youth work	7
Youth Forum	6
Youth café	3
Workshops	2
Community Centre	1

The themes were plotted by size of council (determined by annual income) and shown in Figure 8 below. There is a similar pattern across all sizes of local council with the main themes being engagement via third party organisations, schools and through surveys. Youth clubs were also popular, often delivered via grant funding to third party organisations, along with youth councils and forums.

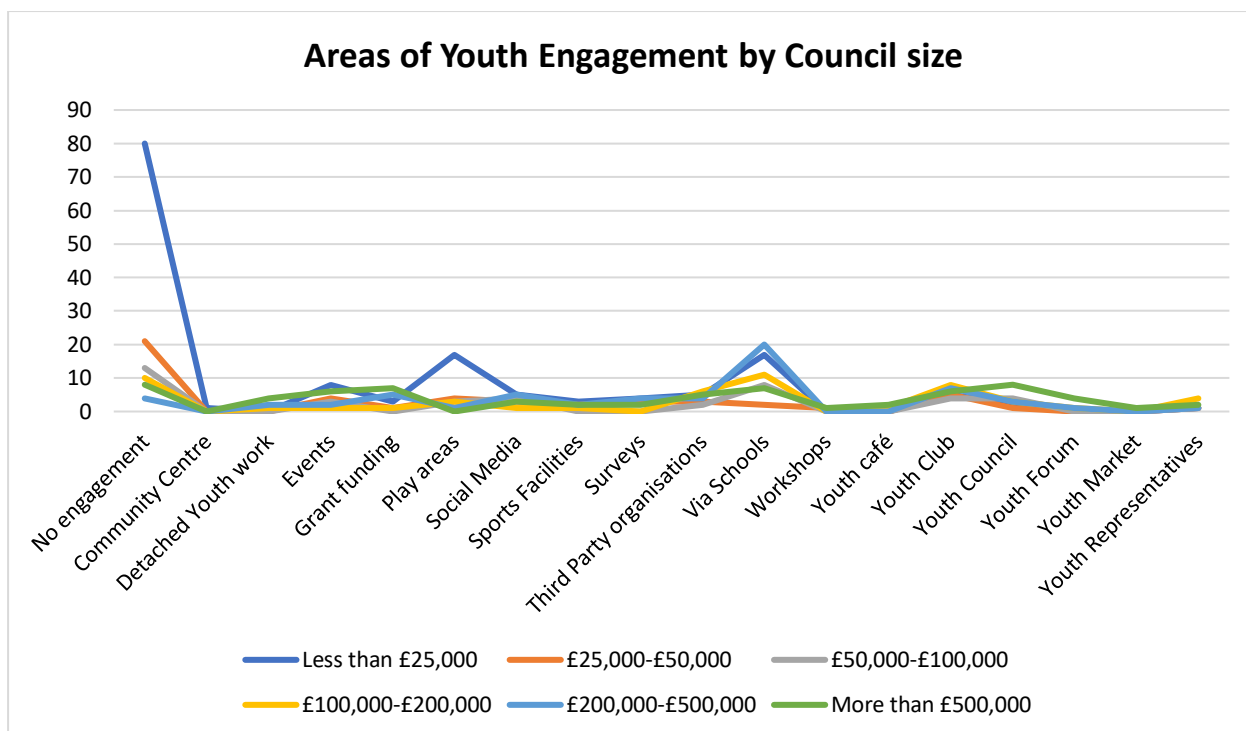


Figure 8 Areas of Youth Engagement

There were many good examples of youth engagement demonstrating that one solution does not suit all local councils.

#### 4.2.7 Identify what makes for a successful youth council

Five per cent of local councils have a youth council, this equated to 23 out of 472 responses. The low number of youth councils means it is hard to definitively identify what makes for a successful youth council with any certainty. This section summarises the factors in common between the 23 youth councils. Geographically, the youth councils in the survey were spread throughout England with 3 in Wales. The data shows that larger councils are more likely to have a youth council than the smaller councils. The survey included questions designed to identify triggers for successful youth councils, such as:

**Budgetary control** – 65% of the youth councils had budgetary control with one council holding an annual budget of more than £8,001. An analysis of the councils that have been established for more than 5 years showed that all but one of the councils had its own budget. This could suggest that a success criterion is budgetary control. Half of the 8 youth councils with no budget have been established only in the past year.

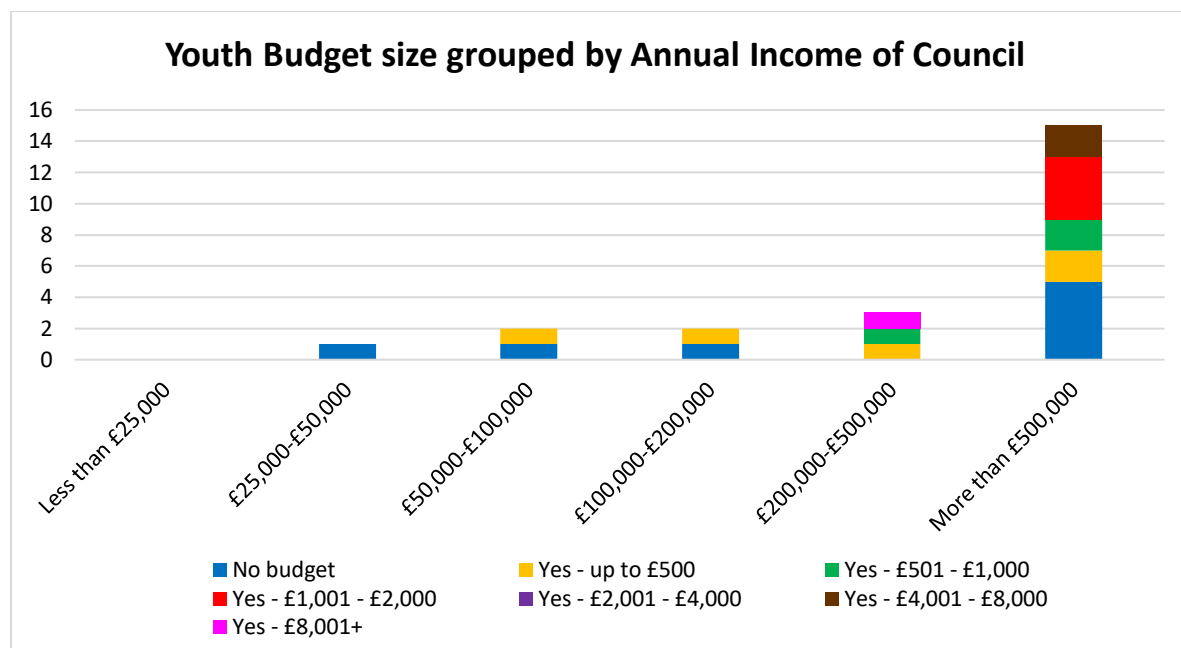


Figure 9 Youth Budget grouped by Annual Income of Council

**Delegated authority** - Only four of the youth councils have delegated authority, two of which have been established for more than 5 years. Interestingly, nine of the youth councils with an allocated budget do not have delegated authority to act or make decisions which would mean that any financial decisions would be referred back to the local council. Delegated authority was an area that the British Youth Council felt led to a successful youth council. Furthermore, lacking the autonomy to act could lead to a sense of disempowerment and tokenism (Matthews, 2001).

**Nominated adult to support the youth council** – All but one of the youth councils was supported by an adult. In the majority of cases (61%) the youth council is supported by a nominated councillor, and 34% supported by youth workers, the remainder were supported by the clerk or other members of staff. However, whilst a nominated adult is helpful for supporting the youth council, adults need to be cautious about overruling the discussion and disempowering the young people. Matthews and Limb (2003) found that adults working with young people can be challenging because adults find it hard to let go of the power. This is more likely to be true when the adults are councillors, whereas youth workers are trained to work with young people and have an interest in helping young people set their own goals.

**Requirement for youth council elections** – British Youth Council (BYC, 2010) notes that this is a good way to demonstrate that the youth councillors have not been selected by adults. However elections can be difficult to manage and young people may find the process daunting. In the survey responses, only one council held elections whilst one other held elections only for the chairman of the youth council. The remainder of youth councillors were nominated by the local schools and / or volunteered. Of interest, 10 respondents answered that they hold elections at least every 4 years for youth councillors despite answering the previous question that the majority volunteered onto the youth council. Further research would be needed to clarify the meaning of the responses. Whilst the BYC's view that elections would demonstrate that the youth councillors have the mandate of their electorate, it is more likely intended for youth councils attached to principal authorities where they are drawing from a larger area.

*Recommendation #4: stress the importance of carefully considering council's capacity for managing a youth council, taking into account resources such as budget, staff time, and appropriate adult support.*

### **4.3 Summary**

The main aim of the research was to examine the success of youth councils as a tool for engaging with young people in order to represent their views. This research found that 23 local councils have an identifiable youth council. If this sample is consistent across England and Wales one could assume there are 480 youth councils within the local council sector. Regrettably, the number of youth councils has not been specifically measured through previous research so there cannot be certainty that the prevalence is increasing. Regardless, youth councils are not the only method of engaging with young people. The research has shown us there are a vast range of alternative methods for youth participation instead of the more traditional youth council approach – many of which could be replicated on a smaller scale.

One objective of the study was to identify common factors that result in the success of a youth council – the results have identified some commonality but would warrant further research on a larger sample to be certain that the success could be replicated. Nonetheless, the research has clearly shown the range of reasons for the lack of youth

councils and overwhelmingly these are due to the size of the council, demographic of the community and the lack of resources in smaller councils.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

This chapter will address both the research approach and the original aim to examine the success of youth councils as a method for representing young people, and whether the lack of youth councils indicates that councils have found more successful ways to engage with young people.

### **5.1 Conclusions**

The research approach has broadly met the initial aims and objectives, however in hindsight it could have been improved by sharing the survey with principal authorities to contrast the prevalence of youth councils at the principal authority level compared to local council. The research findings found that 4.8% of local councils in England and Wales have a youth council. Of those youth councils, the majority were attached to larger local councils who have the resources and capacity to facilitate a youth council. Forty per cent of respondents without a youth council were from local councils with less than £25,000 income per year. The emerging picture from the results was that the smaller councils lacked the resources to facilitate a youth council, and / or were from communities with few young people with no demand for a youth council.

At larger councils there is a different story, they are representing communities with young people and also have the means to encourage participation via a youth council. The research shows that whilst some have had success with youth councils, there are still many councils with the resources that opt for other methods of engagement utilising more informal engagement through youth cafes, clubs, and even a youth market. However, when local councils decide they want to do more to engage with young people one of the first thoughts is to setup a youth council; five respondents to the survey indicated they were considering setting up youth councils. The secondary research would suggest that adult-initiated youth councils are challenging to manage and may negatively impact the democracy of young people. Whilst sector-specific organisations such as NALC and One Voice Wales provide helpful case studies and guidance on engaging with young people, it does not go far enough to address the

challenges faced by local councils as described through the secondary research. This leads us to a set of recommendations in the next section.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

The guidance provided to local councils is broad-stroke and lacking for the diverse range of councils. The research has highlighted some specific recommendations:

### **Recommendation 1: Review use of social media as a means to engage with the community**

Nearly all 16-24 year olds use social media (Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2020), the statistics decrease by participant age with 38% of over-75 year olds using social media. In order to engage with the community, especially hard-to-engage groups, local councils need to improve their social media presence.

### **Recommendation 2: highlight the importance of engaging young people in all areas of council activities**

Approximately, 54% of respondents were not aware of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child that sets out the right for children and young people to have their views heard and taken seriously when making decisions that will affect their lives. Whilst the UK Government has not embedded these Rights into legislation, the local council sector could lead the way and include a consideration of the UNCRC within all its policies, in the same way that local councils have a duty<sup>3</sup> to have regard to conserving biodiversity as part of policy or decision making.

### **Recommendation 3: provide sector guidance on a range of ideas based on council size**

Whilst creation of blueprints would deny young people the opportunity to participate in the design and development of projects, it would promote youth engagement if local councils were provided more specific guidance applicable to their size of council. This would aid smaller councils in meeting their legislative commitments to young people whilst acknowledging the lack of resources at the smaller council to carry out the same functions as larger councils. Templates and checklists would encourage councils to engage with young people to tailor the project or activity.

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<sup>3</sup> Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, s40



**Recommendation 4: stress the importance of carefully considering council's capacity for managing a youth council, taking into account resources such as budget, staff time, and appropriate adult support.**

Guidance on the setup and facilitation of youth councils needs to be updated and should stress the importance of carefully considering whether council has the capacity for a youth council, and especially whether the young people want a youth council. Ideally, youth councils should be initiated by young people with the local council taking a facilitative role. The updated guidance should be more realistic in setting the expectations of councils and identifying the pitfalls with suggested courses of action.

### **5.3 Closing Comments**

Returning to the main aim of the research, literature has demonstrated that democratic engagement through youth councils is a positive step to involve young people in democracy. The primary research has shown that whilst there are examples of successful representation through youth councils there is a recurring theme that youth councils are not an effective solution. The creation of a youth council should not be the end point, but a process of partnership with young people and emphasising their invaluable contributions towards progress and change (USAID, 2009). *“Young people are the future of our communities, and supporting their development and livelihood is paramount to the growth of local (parish and town) councils”* (NALC, 2022).

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## **Appendices**

Appendix A: Survey Questions

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet

Appendix C: Distribution of councils that were sent the survey

Appendix D: Distribution of councils that responded to the survey

Appendix E: Results summary

## Appendix A: Survey Questions

# A survey to examine success rates of youth councils as a tool for youth engagement

The survey will take approximately 6 minutes to complete. Closing date 12th February 2023.

\* Required

### Consent

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the study above. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

\*

☐ Yes

☐ No

2. I agree to my data being anonymised and stored. I agree to it being shared in a relevant archive in this form. \*

☐ Yes

☐ No

3. I understand that my participation is voluntary. I also understand I am free to withdraw at any time - without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. I can decline to answer any particular question, or questions. \*

☐ Yes

☐ No

4. I agree that non identifiable quotes may be published in articles, used in conference presentations, or used for standard academic purposes such as assessment. \*

☐ Yes

☐ No

5. I understand that the data collected during the study may be inspected by a supervisor from De Montfort University. I give permission for the supervisor to have access to my data. \*

☐ Yes

☐ No

6. I agree to take part in the above research project. \*

☐ Yes

☐ No

7. Country \*

☐ England

☐ Wales

☐ Other

8. Which county are you based? (For statistical purposes only)

9. Council annual income \*

☐ Less than £25,000

☐ £25,000-£50,000

☐ £50,000-£100,000

☐ £100,000-£200,000

☐ £200,000-£500,000

☐ More than £500,000



10. How many of the current councillors were elected (contested / uncontested)

The value must be a number

11. How many of the current councillors were co-opted?

The value must be a number

12. How many vacant seats on the council currently?

The value must be a number

13. Which social media channels does the council use? Select all that apply.

☐ Facebook

☐ Twitter

☐ WhatsApp

☐ Instagram

☐ TikTok

☐ Snapchat

☐ None

☐ Other

14. Do you currently have a youth council? \*

☐ Yes

☐ No

15. How long has the Youth Council been established? \*

- ☐ Less than 1 year
- ☐ 1-2 years
- ☐ 2-4 years
- ☐ 5 years +

16. What age range is the Youth Council? Select all that apply. \*

- ☐ Up to 10 years old
- ☐ 10-16 years old
- ☐ 16-18 years old
- ☐ 18-25 years old

17. How are the Youth Councillors selected? Select all that apply. \*

- ☐ Nominated by local school/s
- ☐ Volunteered
- ☐ Elected
- ☐ Other

18. How often do you hold Youth Council elections?

- ☐ Yearly
- ☐ Once every 2 years
- ☐ Once every 4 years
- ☐ Other

19. Is the Youth Council a member of any of these organisations? Select all that apply.

- ☐ National Youth Agency
- ☐ Council for Wales of Voluntary Youth Services
- ☐ British Youth Council

20. Does the Youth Council have an annual budget? Please indicate amount. \*

- ☐ No budget
- ☐ Yes - up to £500
- ☐ Yes - £501 - £1,000
- ☐ Yes - £1,001 - £2,000
- ☐ Yes - £2,001 - £4,000
- ☐ Yes - £4,001 - £8,000
- ☐ Yes - £8,001+

21. Does the Youth Council have delegated authority? \*

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Other

22. How is the Youth Council supported? Select all that apply.

- ☐ Councillor/s nominated to assist the Youth Council
- ☐ Member of staff - Clerk
- ☐ Member of staff - Youth Worker
- ☐ Other

23. Which areas of council business do the youth council get involved with? Select all that apply.

- ☐ Involved in the parish / town council decisions
- ☐ Set own local projects, eg local action on climate change
- ☐ Set own national projects eg campaigning to reduce voting age
- ☐ Youth specific activities, eg youth club, events, recreation
- ☐ Other

24. Does the Youth Council have their own social media channels? Select all that apply.

☐ Facebook

☐ Twitter

☐ WhatsApp

☐ Instagram

☐ TikTok

☐ Snapchat

☐ Other

25. Does the local council promote the Youth Council activities on its social channels?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Don't know

26. Has the Council ever had a Youth Council? \*

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

27. Did the Youth Council end within the last 12 years? \*

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe

28. Why did the Youth Council end? Select all that apply. \*

- ☐ Difficult to retain youth councillors
- ☐ Lack of resources (staff, time, budget)
- ☐ Decision made by the Council to discontinue the Youth Council
- ☐ Other



29. Why does the Council not have a Youth Council currently? Select all that apply. \*

- ☐ Difficult to recruit youth councillors
- ☐ Council runs other youth activities
- ☐ Other organisations run youth activities
- ☐ Council working on other priorities
- ☐ Lack of resources (staff, time, budget)
- ☐ Other

30. How does Council engage with young people? Select all that apply. \*

- ☐ Consultations specific for young people
- ☐ Consultations with adults
- ☐ Drop in events for youth people, eg pizza evening
- ☐ Through the local school/s
- ☐ No direct engagement
- ☐ Other

31. How would you categorise your Council's youth engagement

- ☐ Youth Forum - giving young people a voice to influence decision making
- ☐ Youth Provision - providing young people with activities, recreation facilities, sports activities
- ☐ Youth Consultation - finding out what young people want
- ☐ No direct engagement
- ☐ Other

32. Are you aware of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child? \*

☐ Yes

☐ No

33. Please use this section to summarise how your council engages with young people.

---

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Microsoft. The data you submit will be sent to the form owner.

## **Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet**

**Title of Project:** Research into the success rates of youth councils as a tool for youth engagement

**Name of Researcher(s):** Julie Shirley

### **Introduction**

You have been invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether to take part it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with your council if you wish to. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

### **What is the research about?**

Local (Parish and Town) Councils support young people through a variety of means, one such method is through a youth council.

This survey will help us understand how many youth councils there are across England and Wales at the local council level and identify reasons why councils do not have a youth council. This information will help to shape guidance on the setup and support of youth councils.

### **Who is funding the research?**

There is no external funding used for this research.

### **What does the survey involve?**

The online survey is in five sections: The first section details all the consents we need to meet ethical guidelines, the second section is for factual information about your council – size, location, etc. Respondents will then complete either section 3 or section 4 depending on whether they have a youth council or not. The final section gives you the opportunity to add more information if you wish. The survey should take no more than 6 minutes to complete.

All information which is collected about your council during the course of the research will be kept on a password protected database. Any identifiable information you may give will be removed and anonymised.

The data collected during the study may be inspected by a supervisor from De Montfort University. Participants can withdraw their consent to use the data at any time until the final report is published. All data will be destroyed within 12 months after final report is published.

### **How will the information be used?**

The responses received will be analysed to see how different characteristics of a council – size, location etc – affect a council's ability to operate a youth council. The responses will also determine the number of youth councils in England and Wales at local council level, and reasons for success. The final report will be submitted as part of the MA in Public Leadership and Management, and shared with the local council sector.

**Who has reviewed the study?**

This study has been reviewed and approved by De Montfort University, Faculty of Business and Law Research Ethics Committee.

If you have a complaint regarding anything to do with this study, you can initially approach the researcher. If this achieves no satisfactory outcome, you should then contact the Administrator for the Faculty Research Ethics Committee, Research and Innovation Office, Faculty of Business and Law, De Montfort University, The Gateway, Leicester, LE1 9BH or [BAResearchEthics@dmu.ac.uk](mailto:BAResearchEthics@dmu.ac.uk)

By participating in the survey you give your consent in accordance with the consent statement available at the end of this document.

Thank you for taking part in the study.

## Research Participant Consent Form

**Title of Research Project:** Research into the success rates of youth councils as a tool for youth engagement

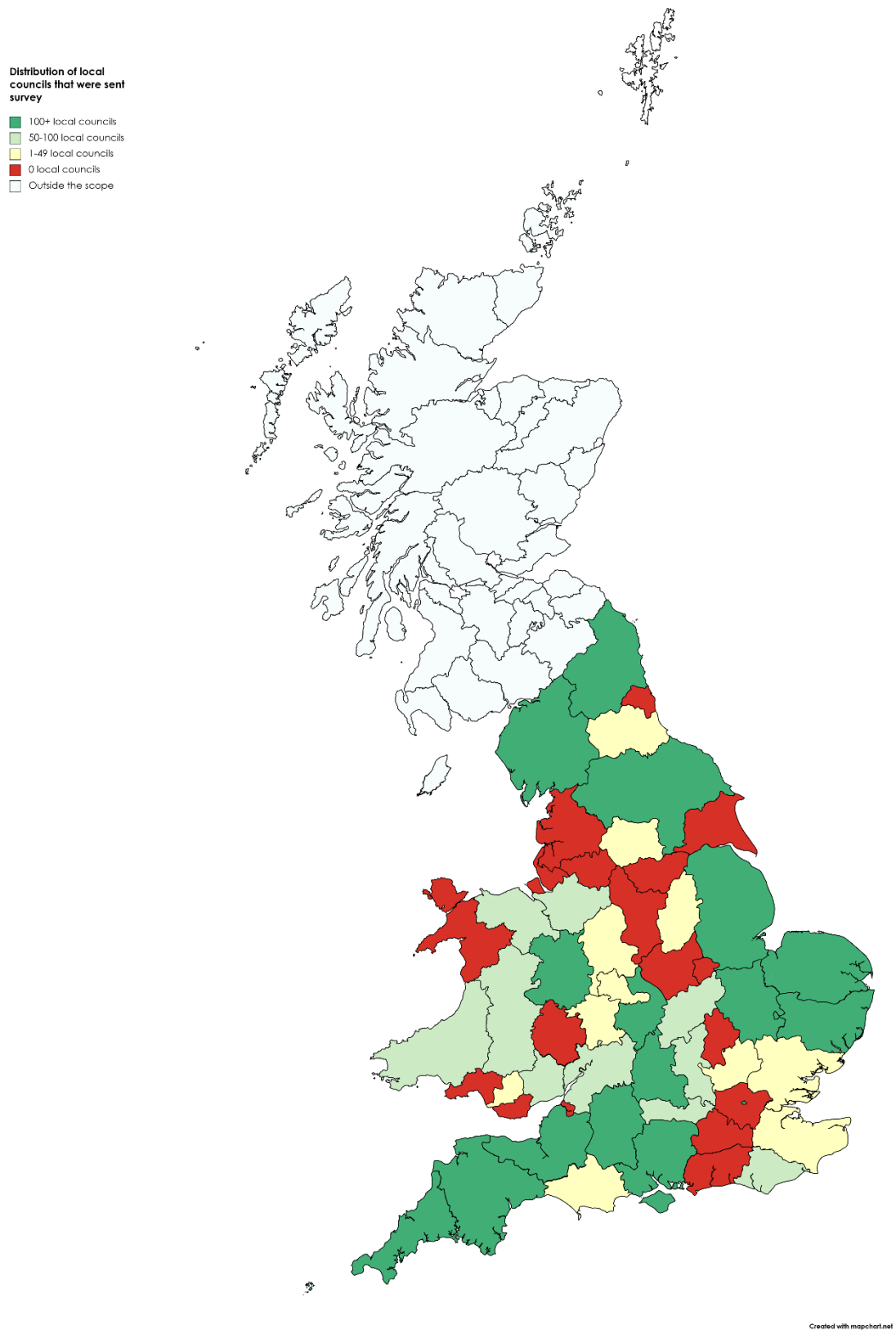
Please tick all  
boxes if you

**Name of Researcher:** Julie Shirley

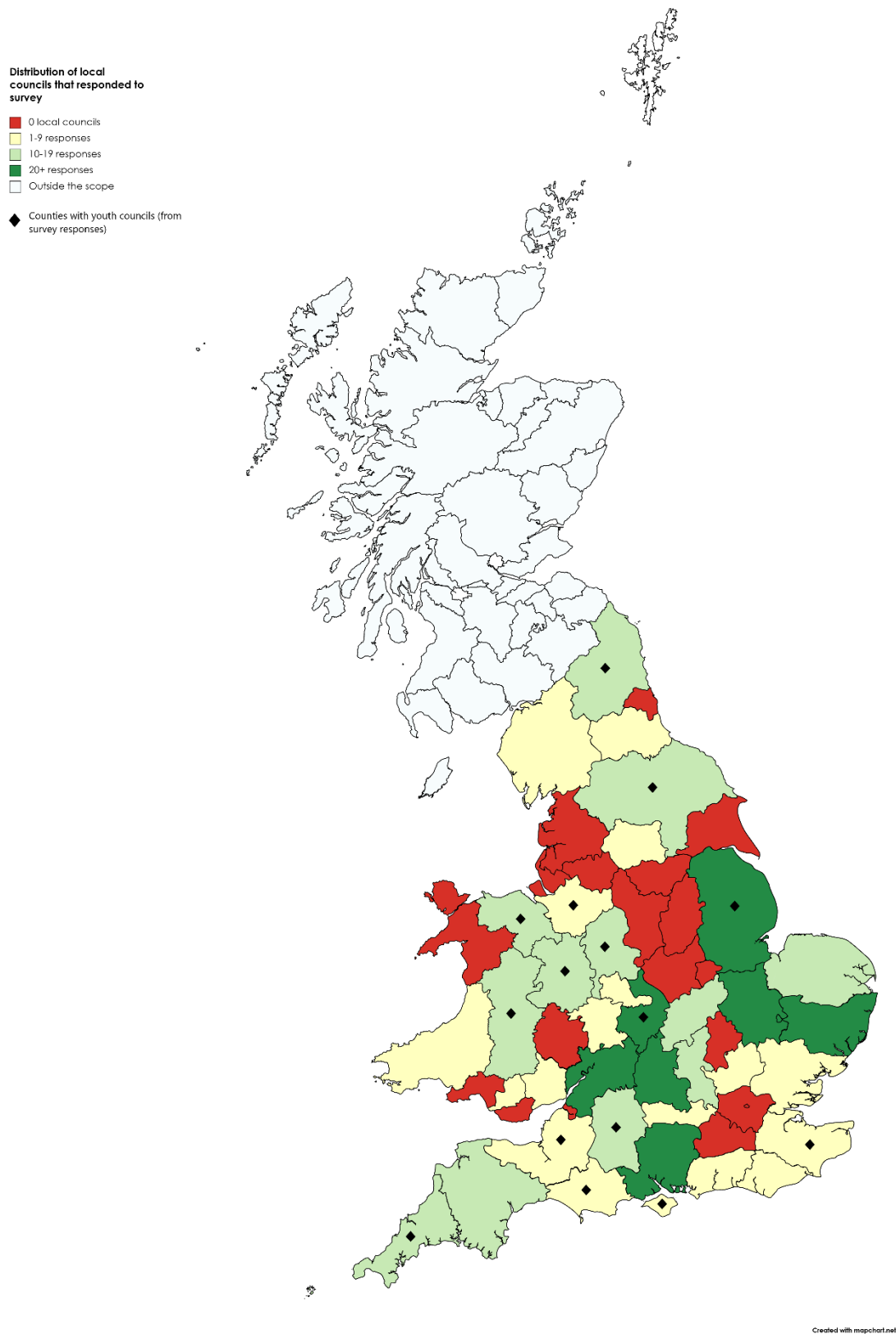
1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the study above. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐
2. I agree to my data being anonymised and stored. I agree to it being shared in a relevant archive in this form. ☐
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary. I also understand I am free to withdraw at any time - without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. I can decline to answer any particular question, or questions. ☐
4. I agree that non identifiable quotes may be published in articles, used in conference presentations, or used for standard academic purposes such as assessment. ☐
5. I understand that the data collected during the study may be inspected by a supervisor from De Montfort University. I give permission for the supervisor to have access to my data. ☐
6. I agree to take part in the above research project. ☐

The survey will include the above consent statements before allowing the participant to proceed with the survey.

## Appendix C: Distribution of councils that were sent the survey



## Appendix D: Distribution of councils that responded to the survey





Appendix E: Results Summary

A survey to examine success rates of youth councils as a tool for youth engagement

474

Responses

21:18

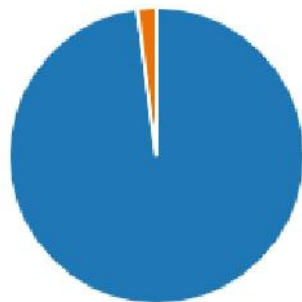
Average time to complete

Closed

Status

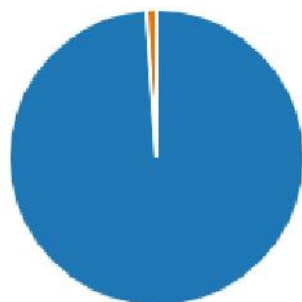
1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the study above. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

- Yes464
- No10

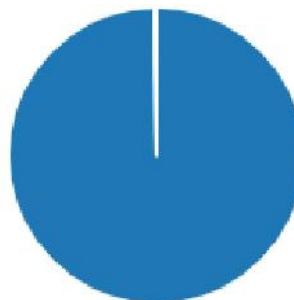


2. I agree to my data being anonymised and stored. I agree to it being shared in a relevant archive in this form.

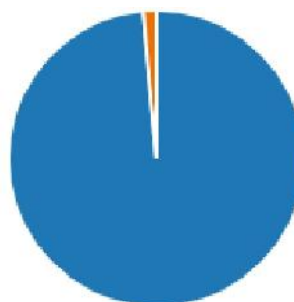
- Yes469
- No5



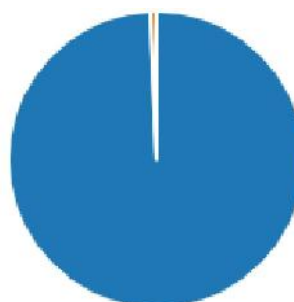
3. I understand that my participation is voluntary. I also understand I am free to withdraw at any time - without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. I can decline to answer any particular question, or questions.



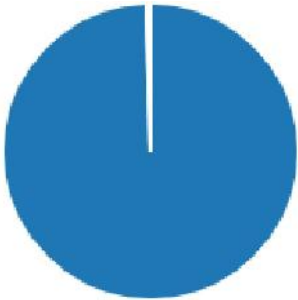
4. I agree that non identifiable quotes may be published in articles, used in conference presentations, or used for standard academic purposes such as assessment.



5. I understand that the data collected during the study may be inspected by a supervisor from De Montfort University. I give permission for the supervisor to have access to my data.



6. I agree to take part in the above research project.



7. Country



8. Which county are you based? (For statistical purposes only)

466  
Responses

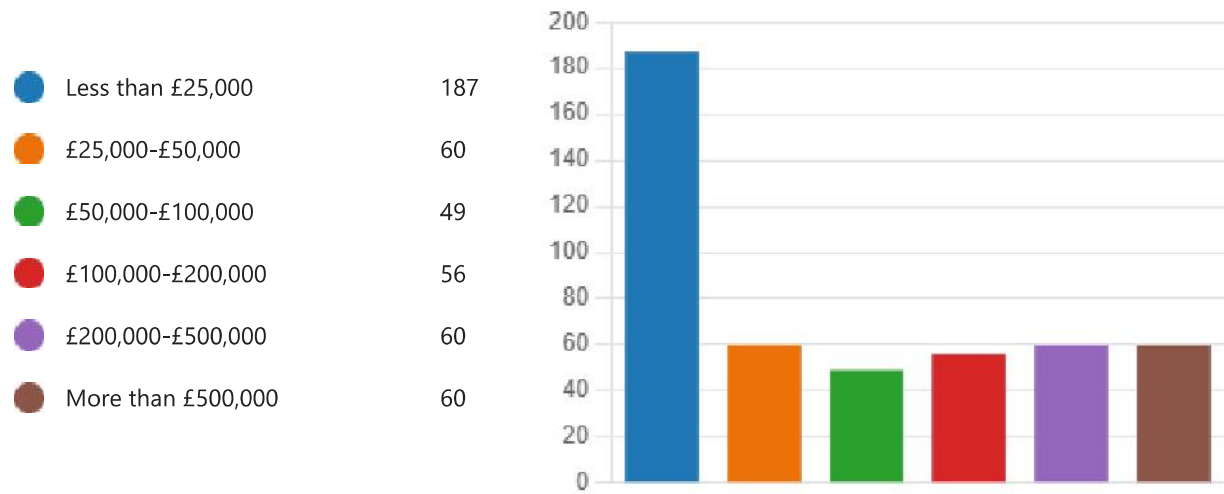
Latest Responses  
"Powys"  
"West Northamptonshire "  
"Gloucestershire"

[Update](#)

26 respondents (6%) answered **Cornwall** for this question.



9. Council annual income

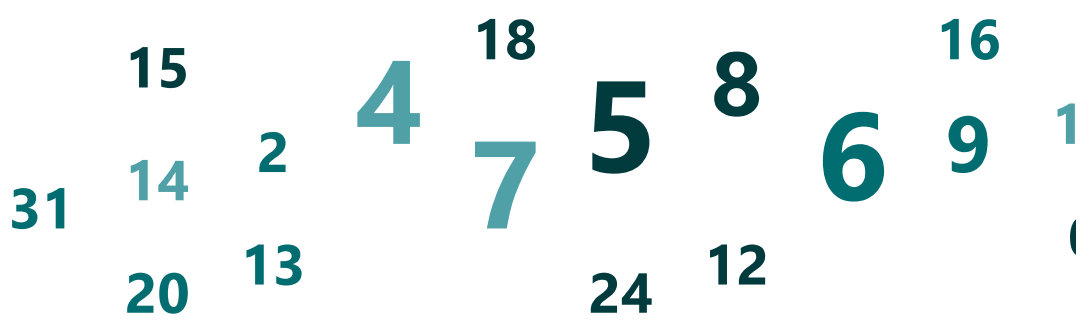


10. How many of the current councillors were elected (contested / uncontested)



[Update](#)

49 respondents (11%) answered 5 for this question.



11. How many of the current councillors were co-opted?

468  
Responses

Latest Responses

"0"  
"2"  
"1"

 Update

117 respondents (26%) answered 0 for this question.



12. How many vacant seats on the council currently?

470  
Responses

Latest Responses

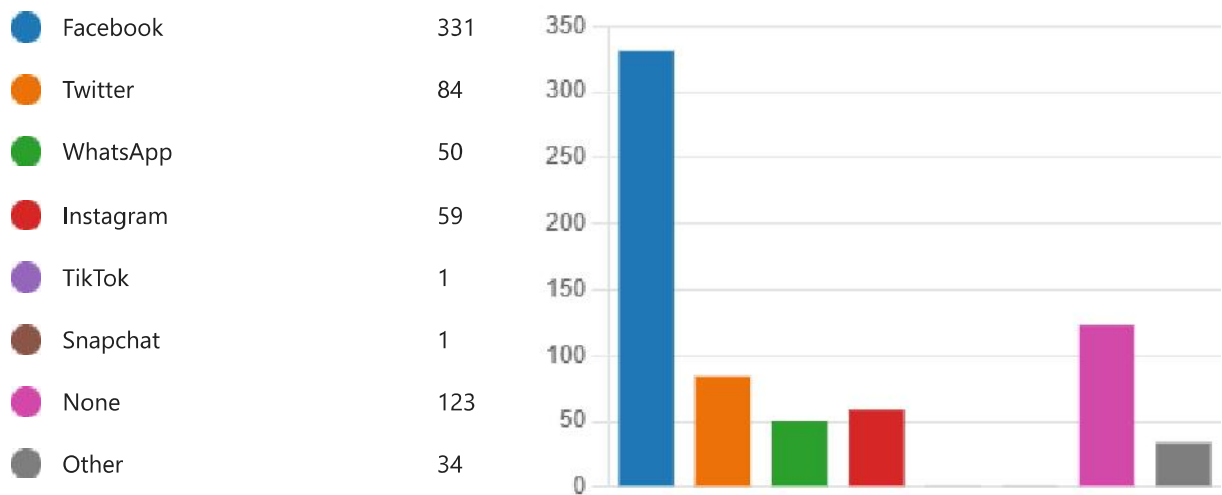
"0"  
"1"  
"0"

 Update

263 respondents (59%) answered 0 for this question.



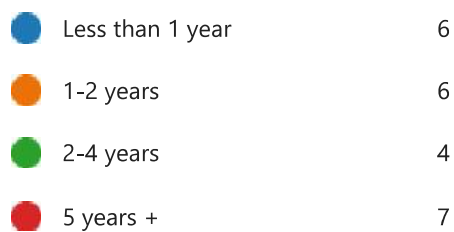
13. Which social media channels does the council use? Select all that apply.



14. Do you currently have a youth council?

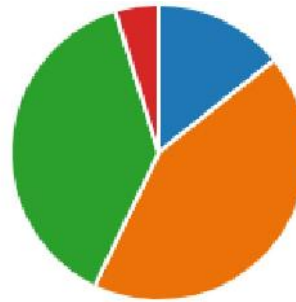


15. How long has the Youth Council been established?



16. What age range is the Youth Council? Select all that apply.

Up to 10 years old	6
10-16 years old	18
16-18 years old	16
18-25 years old	2



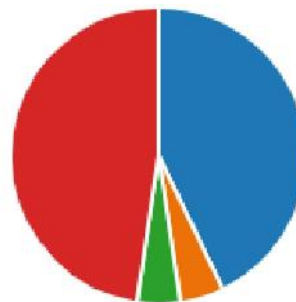
17. How are the Youth Councillors selected? Select all that apply.

Nominated by local school/s	10
Volunteered	17
Elected	1
Other	1



18. How often do you hold Youth Council elections?

Yearly	9
Once every 2 years	1
Once every 4 years	1
Other	10

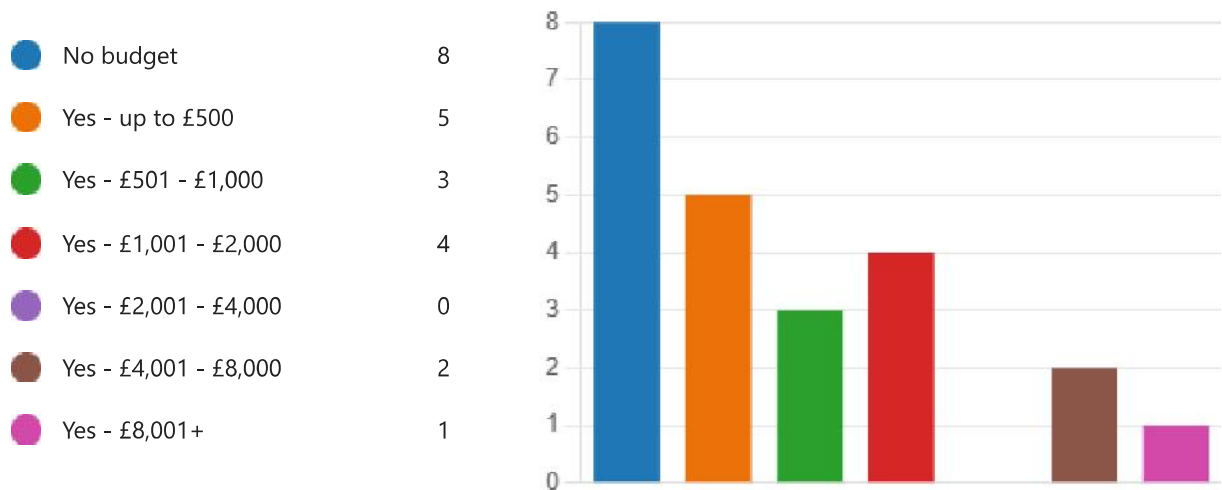


19. Is the Youth Council a member of any of these organisations? Select all that apply.

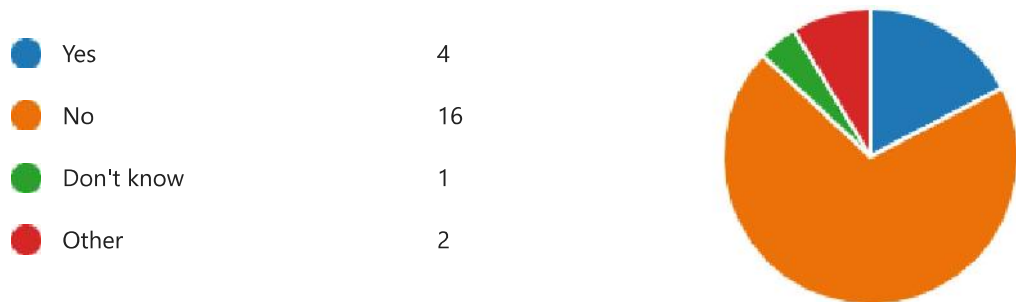
National Youth Agency	1
Council for Wales of Voluntary Y...	0
British Youth Council	2



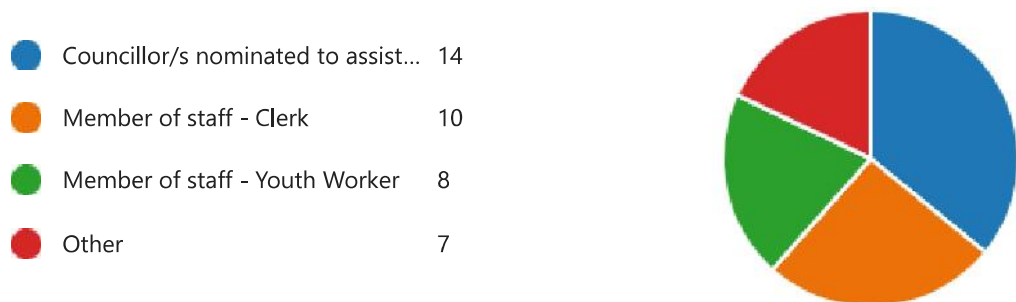
20. Does the Youth Council have an annual budget? Please indicate amount.



21. Does the Youth Council have delegated authority?



22. How is the Youth Council supported? Select all that apply.





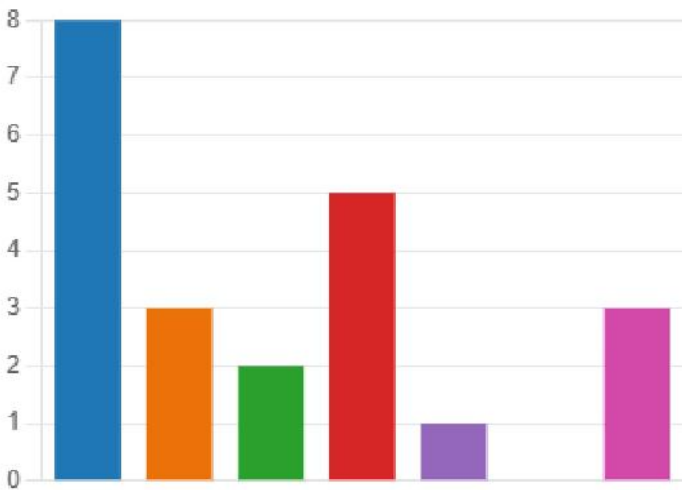
23. Which areas of council business do the youth council get involved with? Select all that apply.

Involved in the parish / town co...	12
Set own local projects, eg local ...	20
Set own national projects eg ca...	2
Youth specific activities, eg yout...	16
Other	3



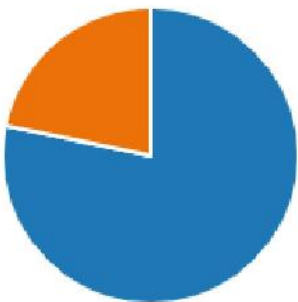
24. Does the Youth Council have their own social media channels? Select all that apply.

Facebook	8
Twitter	3
WhatsApp	2
Instagram	5
TikTok	1
Snapchat	0
Other	3



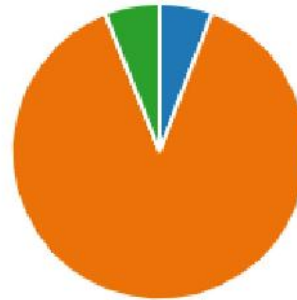
25. Does the local council promote the Youth Council activities on its social channels?

Yes	18
No	5
Don't know	0



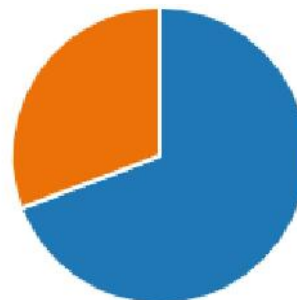
26. Has the Council ever had a Youth Council?

Yes	26
No	396
Don't know	27



27. Did the Youth Council end within the last 12 years?

Yes	18
No	8
Maybe	0

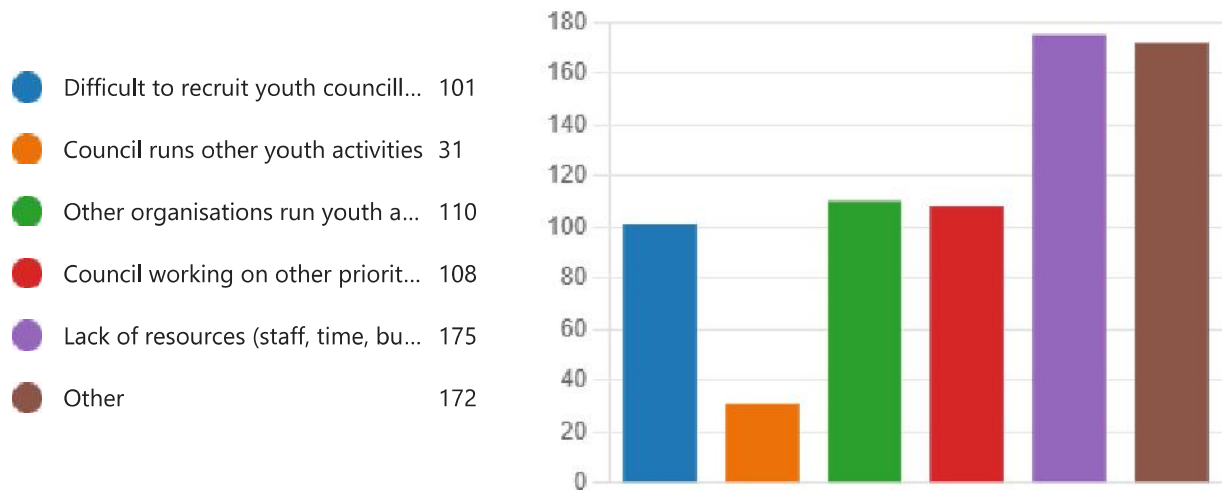


28. Why did the Youth Council end? Select all that apply.

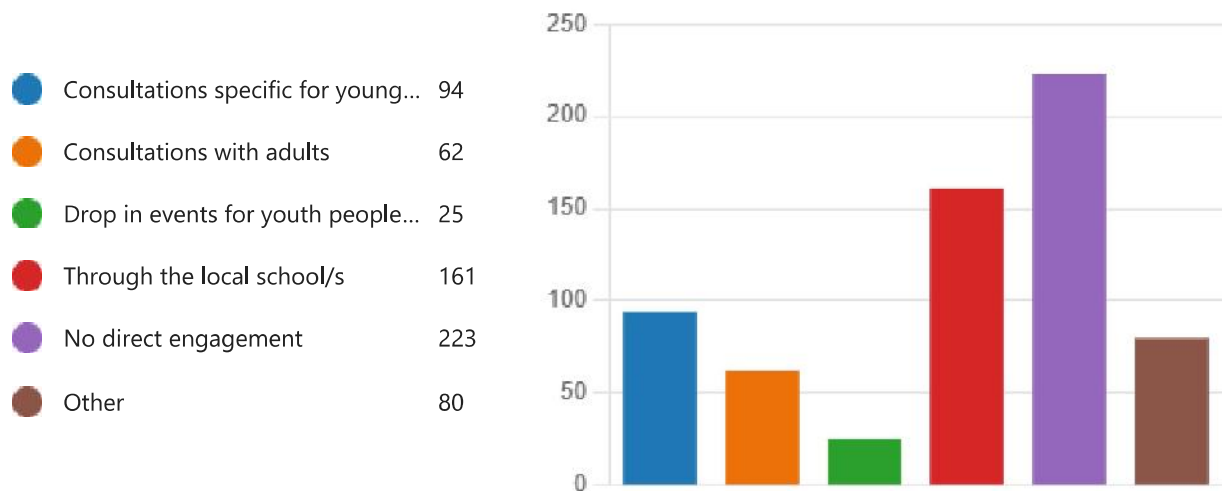
Difficult to retain youth council...	15
Lack of resources (staff, time, bu...	8
Decision made by the Council t...	3
Other	7



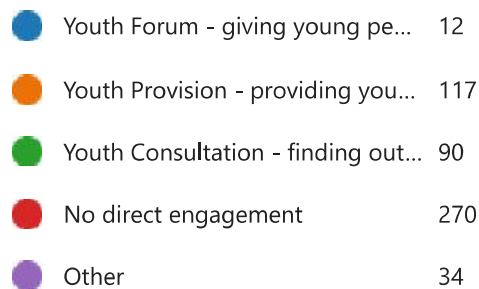
29. Why does the Council not have a Youth Council currently? Select all that apply.



30. How does Council engage with young people? Select all that apply.



31. How would you categorise your Council's youth engagement



32. Are you aware of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child?

Yes

215

No

257



33. Please use this section to summarise how your council engages with young people.

Latest Responses

356

Responses

"When using social engagement the school children are invol...

"I have recently proposed a motion to engage a "Youth Coun...

"The council contributed funding to help set up a Youth Club ...

[Update](#)

119 respondents (36%) answered **young people** for this question.

