

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

30 MAY 2017

MEDWAY YOUTH PARLIAMENT – ANNUAL CONFERENCE FINDINGS

Report from: Ian Sutherland, Director of Children and Adults Services

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Summary

The attached report, prepared by the Medway Youth Parliament (MYP), provides the Committee with the findings and outcomes from the MYP Annual Youth Conference held in November 2016, which was entitled 'Race, Religion and You(th): United in Tackling Racism and Religious Discrimination'.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

1.1 The terms of reference for the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Chapter 4 Part 5 paragraph 22.2 (b) of the Constitution) state; "to fulfil all the functions of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee in relation to children".

2. Background

2.1 For the first time, in March 2015, the Medway Youth Parliament (MYP) representatives who sat on the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee brought forward a report to the Committee providing details of the key findings from MYP's 2014 Annual Youth Conference. It was agreed that the MYP should be invited to provide a similar report on an annual basis, informing the Committee of the outcomes of its latest annual conference.

2.2 The MYP's last Annual Youth Conference was held on Wednesday 23 November 2016 and was entitled 'Race Religion and You(th): United in Tackling Racism and Religious Discrimination'. The conference consisted of three workshops:

- What is racism?
- Misconceptions about culture and religion

- Politics and the media influence
- 2.3 The report attached at Appendix 1 gives further details of the conference and the key findings from each workshop session.

3. Conclusions of the conference

3.1 The MYP made the following conclusions from the conference:

- Young people felt that racism is not being tackled sufficiently in Medway, that no one tackles it and it is often ignored;
- Racism in young people is caused by ignorance and social media breeds this as people can hide behind computer screens;
- Young people who attended felt that more young people should have the opportunity to take part in such workshops and that they should be available through schools to help tackle the problems.

3.2 MYP are keen to keep up their involvement with Kent Police and are interested to be involved in the new Youth Independent Police Advisory Group (IPAG). They are also keen to see the Youth Liaison Officers which are being introduced next year. MYP feel this is a really positive development in trying to improve the relationship between young people and the police.

3.3 MYP are going to contact the local press to raise awareness of the impact that the media has on our perceptions of others and the fact that young people feel it fuels racism.

3.4 MYP members are going to put a pack together of all the workshop activities that were delivered on the day. This will be offered to all secondary schools in Medway so that more young people can access the activities and have a greater understanding of the issue.

4. Director's Comments

4.1 We deliver work/support to young people that are designed to challenge people's perceptions to achieve our goal to reduce all forms of racism and discrimination, break down social barriers and promote social inclusion. We want our young people to understand that their worldview is just one way of seeing the world. With this approach we aim to stimulate the growth of cultural awareness and the adoption and development of crucial traits such as openness, cultural empathy, curiosity and tolerance. Equipping children with these tools will empower them to challenge prejudice. We also train staff in understanding the different cultures we support here in Medway. Also, through the Community Safety Partnership, a range of measures are pursued to tackle racism. One example is our commitment that immediate action is taken to remove racist graffiti within public spaces in Medway.

4.2 There is a requirement for all schools to have a written Racial Equality policy (either a separate policy or a distinct section within a broader equal opportunities policy), which encompasses the following:

- The policy commits the school to work towards racial equality and to combat racial discrimination and racial harassment;
- Clear procedures should be in place which ensure that racist incidents, racial discrimination and racial harassment are dealt with promptly, firmly and consistently;
- In the PSHE and Citizenship curriculum, pupils in Key Stages 1-4 have opportunities to examine and understand issues such as identity, culture and anti-social behaviour.

4.3 As always, we can do more and I will ensure that Council Officers work with you to review the key themes and areas for action emerging from the MYP Conference to develop a programme of work to tackle this further, looking at how we can improve as a Local Authority, along with our partners, to address some of the concerns raised.

5. Risk management

5.1 There are no specific risk implications for Medway Council arising directly from this report.

6. Legal and Financial Implications

6.1 There are no legal or financial implications for the Council arising from the report.

7. Recommendations

7.1 Members are asked to note the update report attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Medway Youth Parliament: Annual Conference 2016 Report

Background papers

None.



MEDWAY YOUTH PARLIAMENT ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2016 REPORT

This report seeks to inform on the findings of the Medway Youth Parliament's (MYP) Annual Conference, which took place on Wednesday 23rd November 2016 and was entitled 'Race, Religion and You(th): United in Tackling Racism and Religious Discrimination'

Background

Medway Youth Parliament (MYP) was established for young people to come together and discuss issues that need addressing and create campaigns to improve the lives of young people within the area. We are made up of representatives from all secondary schools in Medway and partner youth organisations. We are a fully inclusive organisation providing members are between the ages of 11 and 18 and live, study or work in Medway.

Annually, MYP holds an annual conference based on a topic decided upon by the whole of the Parliament. The day consists of a central theme, which is then split into various subgroups. Those who attend our conference attend three workshops on the sub-topics, watch presentations and take part in an afternoon debate/Q&A with a specially selected panel.



MYP Annual Conference 2016

All Medway secondary schools and special schools were sent an invitation for a small group of their students to attend and participate in the conference. These students usually are members of their school councils or hold some representative role within their school, however this is not necessary. Those students attending the conference ranged from Year 7 to Year 13. The whole day is run by MYP, who start organising the event in July.

Members of Medway Youth Parliament sit on the UK Youth Parliament and 'Tackling Racism and Religious Discrimination' has been one of their campaigns for the past year. Members spoke to other young people in schools and youth centres and some expressed concerns over racism. We decided to investigate this further so chose this as the topic of our conference.

The Annual Conference of November 2016, entitled 'Race, Religion and You(th): United in Tackling Racism and Religious Discrimination', consisted of three workshops: 'What is Racism?'; 'Misconceptions about Culture and Religion' and 'Politics and the Media influence'.



Aims

The aim of the conference was to open up frank and honest discussion amongst young people around the topic of racism and religious discrimination. Some young people are anxious when talking about the issue for fear of being labelled racist themselves. Members wanted to dispel some of the myths and preconceived ideas around different races and cultures and debate around the affect the media has on these.

Another aim was to discuss people's experiences of racism and how it was dealt with if it was reported; to see if this was a positive or negative experience.

Above all, we wanted to find out young people's ideas and views on how we tackle the problem of racism and religious discrimination in Medway and how to take this forward.

'What is Racism?' Workshop

This workshop explored what young people class as racism, what they would class as 'banter' and where to draw the line through a variety of role play scenarios.

Medway Youth Parliament members enacted scenarios that on the whole shocked participants but led to open and frank discussions around what is actually classed as racism. Discussions then led onto whether the young people felt that racism is being dealt with sufficiently in Medway.



Findings and Recommendations

Some young people stated that the role play scenarios were uncomfortable to watch and mostly agreed that most of the scenarios were racism. The consensus amongst young people was that racism is caused by ignorance and that social media breeds this as people can hide behind their computer or phone screens.

Most young people felt that racism is not being tackled sufficiently in Medway, that no one tackles it and that it is often ignored. They said that they regularly see it and that people turn a blind eye. It was discussed how incidents of hate crime in Medway did not increase following Brexit but the young people felt that this was only because people did not report it. The reasons young people felt incidents of racism were not reported were that people feel it is a waste of time as nothing gets done, that there is no proof it has happened and that it would cause them even more distress to report it.

The generation gap was discussed and the participants felt that young people are more tolerant and accepting than previous generations although there is still a 'do nothing' attitude towards incidents of racism. It was felt that young people need to have more faith in the police and faith that something will be done when they report an incident of racism, so relationships between the police and young people need to be improved.

The participants felt that all young people should be able to access the workshops that they took part in today and that it would be a good activity to take into schools.

‘Misconceptions about Culture and Religion’ Workshop

This workshop looked at young people’s misconceptions around culture and religion through three different activities. There was an activity where young people had to pair up words with their definitions, for example emancipation, xenophobia, heritage, ethnicity etc. It was hoped that this would give young people a better understanding of what was being discussed and some of the words that other people may use.

This was followed by an activity where people were given pictures of people from different ethnic background to put in order of how scary they looked. This was then discussed as a group. On the back of the cards was a description of the person and what they had achieved or not achieved in life. Some were high achieving motivational people, some were serial killers etc. This brought up some interesting discussions.

The workshop concluded with a quiz about different countries, cultures and the origins of food, sports and such like.



Findings and Recommendations

All in all this was a very enjoyable workshop with lots of discussions, competition amongst participants and lots of laughter.

This workshop highlighted the misconceptions and challenged some of the preconceived ideas that young people have about different cultures and religions. The young people said that the word and definition activity gave an understanding of how certain words can affect a wide range of cultures and religions and that the workshop as a whole gave a good insight into what other cultures contribute to the world.

All of the young people were interested in the views of others and readily discussed and shared ideas. Many of the young people said they would like to come to another conference like this and that it should be available for all young people.

'Politics and the Media Influence' Workshop

This workshop explored whether young people feel that politics and the media influence levels of racism and religious discrimination. The workshop consisted of news and video clips and discussion around these, primarily around three question areas.

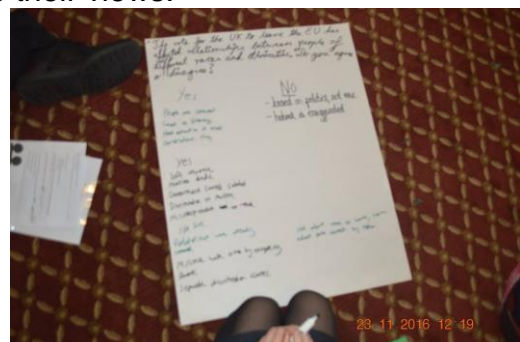


Findings and Recommendations

Statement one was **'The vote for the UK to leave the EU has adversely affected relationships between people of different races and ethnicities'**. 83 people agreed with this and only 10 disagreed. Although the young people felt that racism was there before the vote, they felt that it was 'more acceptable' now to be racist. Statement two was **'The media affects your perception of racism'**. 87 people agreed and only 6 disagreed. Some young people felt that it depended on the source of media as to your views but almost all agreed it did affect this. Most people felt that social media was the main source of media that affects young people's views. Statement three was **'The media affects your perception of immigration'**. 71 people agreed and 22 disagreed with this statement. Most young people stated that as they do not know a lot about immigration, it is inevitable that the media is going to affect this. They also said that it would depend which media source you look at as to your views on it. Although most young people agreed, there were those young people who felt they made their own minds up regardless.

Most participants believed that racism is also heavily influenced by the views of older family members and that young people should attempt to intervene to find out why people have such views. The general finding was that current political events have encouraged people to be more vocal about their views than they previously would have been as they now believe that others share their views.

The majority of young people in the workshops recommended that workshops like this should be done in schools in order to educate other young people.



MiPod

The MiPod is an inflatable interview booth where students were asked a set of questions for us to obtain data. We had a few technical difficulties which, unfortunately, meant that not all young people got a chance to visit the MiPod. The questions that were asked were:

- Have you experienced racism?
- Did you report it?
- What was the outcome?



Findings and Recommendations

The minority of students said that they have experienced or witnessed racism. These were witnessed in a variety of settings including schools and public areas. Most people did not report it because it was not their business, they did not know the people or they did not want to tell on their friends. Some young people, however, told teachers and parents. The response was that the racist young person got into trouble and was excluded from school. Parents and teachers were involved in these instances and letters were also sent home.

Most young people felt that racism should be reported when seen and that young people should be made aware of where to draw the line; maybe through more education in schools. Young people felt that incidents of racism should be dealt with in schools and the pupils involved excluded.



Afternoon Q&A Session with panel of experts

Prior to the debate in the afternoon we had '*Medway Speakers Corner*' set up a podium for those attending the day to speak for one minute on an issue in which they felt personally passionately about. The activity was a huge success, with many students having a go themselves. This gave young people another opportunity to speak out about racism and religious discrimination.



The Q&A session with our adult panel of experts took place after lunch. A carefully selected board of panellists were to reside over questions on the day's topic posed by the active audience members. On the panel were:

- Matthew Scott the Police and Crime Commissioner
- Chief Inspector Simon Allan of Kent Police
- Ian Thomson from Kent, Fire and Rescue
- Anwar Khan, Coordinator of the Kent Muslim Welfare Association
- Mr Faran Forghani, Chairman of the Medway Inter Faith Action (MIFA)
- Bianca Oravcova, MA student at UCL studying politics and security with a focus on migration and refugees
- Juraj Pohlodko a Sport Leader in the Czechoslovak Society in Medway representing the Roma community

Debate was led by a series of questions by the audience to promote discussion on the most pressing matters from the day's topic.

Findings and Recommendations

This was the opportunity for the young people to ask questions of the panel to spark off further debate. The panel were very vocal and as a result debate was limited.

However, from the questions we learnt that the panel felt that the people they represented were often correctly portrayed in society but that the media sometimes portray incorrect depictions of people which can cause racism. The panel members felt that communication is a big part of understanding each other and a big factor in removing labels in society. They felt that the news can cause prejudice and misconceptions through exaggerated or over opinionated stories and that we need to understand and educate each other around our differences to remove these barriers. The panel said that the misconception of people's appearance is a big factor when discussing hate crime. As we are up against the mass media giving us opinions we need to educate each other to break this cycle of prejudice and misconception. We all need to work together to make this happen and to empower our generation and future generations to be inclusive and accepting of all.



A lot of questions were aimed at Kent Police in respect of how religious discrimination is dealt with and the consequences of hate crime. They stated that every crime when reported will be treated equally and fairly and the victim will be supported. Kent Police said that 412 racially or religiously motivated crimes were reported last year, which they seemed to feel was a low number, so it would conclude that people did not report the hate crimes they experienced. This led on to the question of mistrust of the police and how they plan to regain trust. Kent Police stated that they are keen to listen to the community and explained that they realised they need to be more open. They are currently reviewing some of the operations that happen in the police force.

The young people were keen to find out how Kent Police plan to break down barriers between young people and the police and how they are going to listen to young people. Chief Inspector Simon Alland then spoke about how Kent Police are planning to establish a Youth IPAG (Independent Police Advisory Group) with whom they will consult with on community issues. He stated that they have a PCSO based at Medway Universities, who holds regular drop in sessions for the students and there are plans to bring in Youth Liaison Officers in the summer of 2017. He stated that they continue to attend as many events as possible where young people are in attendance to speak to young people and try to break down some of the barriers, whilst listening to what young people have to say and taking this on board.

Feedback from Young People

At the end of the day, the young people were asked to evaluate their experience. Most were really positive; here is a snapshot of the responses:

'I've enjoyed meeting new people and listening to their opinions'

'More workshops please'

'I have a wider understanding of racism and religion''

'I gained further and stronger confidence to voice my opinions'



'I would change the amount of time given because it wasn't long enough'

'More schools should join in this activity''



'I enjoyed sharing my thoughts and feelings'

'I loved the diversity of different people's opinions and views'

'In my opinion you should go to school and do something like this so everyone gets it'

'Spread awareness of Medway Youth Parliament''

'I enjoyed learning about the impact of social media on racism'

'Thank you for this experience and opportunity'

'I enjoyed being able to debate with other people about sensitive topics'

Summary and Further Actions

From our point of view the conference was a huge success and we have had some excellent feedback both from the young people and adults who attended. The young people who attended were able to have open conversations around race and religion in a safe environment without the fear and anxiety of being judged or of what might happen next. They were able to voice their opinions and views whilst listening to those of others and gaining a greater understanding of not only other religions and cultures but of how people have experienced discrimination and dealt with this.

Some young people were clearly unhappy with the police or their perception of the police, so it was good for them to be able to air their concerns with them and get answers. Medway Youth Parliament are keen to keep up their involvement with Kent Police and are interested to be involved in the new Youth IPAG and to see the Youth Liaison Officers next year which we feel is a really positive development in trying to improve the relationship between young people and the police.

Young people at the conference stated that they have a greater understanding of the impact of the media, especially social media, on our perceptions of others. As a lot of the participants felt that the media often fuels racism, we will be contacting the local press to raise awareness of this issue.

As the young people felt that it would be beneficial for all young people to have the opportunity to take part in the workshop activities that MYP delivered on the day through their schools, we are also going to put a pack together of the workshop activities. This will be offered to all secondary schools in Medway, who will be encouraged to deliver our sessions.



Thank you for taking the time to read our report.