Introduction

Over the past eight years the Waveney Youth Council has always strived to give opportunities for young people to get actively involved and voice their own and others opinions.

I am proud, as I’m sure you are, of the Waveney Youth Council for their commitment and enthusiastic approach to the community throughout the last 12 months I have had the pleasure of chairing. Every year the Waveney Youth Council has taken several steps of success, including awards and recognition from The British Youth Council and Suffolk County Councils Raising The Bar initiative, as well as the increase of development in Projects the Council showcase. However, this year has appealed to me as a time of setting up a stable and well structured Council for members to take a new approach. There had been comments from students stating that they didn’t benefit from the meetings and didn’t gain as much information as intended due to the lack of engagement and interaction with all members of the Council. Since November we have introduced broad discussion points that the Council desired, witnessing others take lead in agenda items and researching priorities they felt a passionate need to explore in depth.

I am constantly reminded of the motivation the Council gives myself and others and certainly gives a good name to the community and its young people. The engagement of young people has increased every year, and I am proud to see that when engagement seems to lack, the Council recognise this and push to find a solution.

The pride of our Projects which we have been closely connected with, such as the Transition Ambassador Project and the Holiday Activities Project, has always shone through and the constant brainstorming from the Project team keeps each focus sustained, well structured and inspiring.

Below shows the focuses of projects and action points we have developed and showcased throughout the year.

Gaining an increase in encouragement and engagement in Young People

Over the past year, myself and other members of the Waveney Youth Council have felt a need to encourage young people at the meetings to involve themselves and others in discussions and the development of the Council. Ever since the lack of take up of positions on the committee at the 2016 Annual General Meeting, it was recognised that the Council's main focus was to enhance attendees with a worthwhile interactive meeting structure and gain young people's enthusiasm. Agenda items involving discussion based activities were developed so that the young people themselves were running them. Each School took on a
specific topic after voting took place to identify the top priorities for the WYC to develop further, those being:
- Expansion of PSHE with specific focus on life skills (Money management, relationships, careers advice)
- The awareness of Mental Health and support available to young people
- More support in Schools for students with learning difficulties, to include volunteering and work experience for young people with additional needs.

These are topics that the Youth Council felt passionate to explore and research, allowing students to be active in and outside of meetings. They presented their ideas to the Council on why they felt these were worthwhile and important priorities and how they felt we could explore them actively in the community.

Showing passion and integrity to work with High Schools throughout the Transition Ambassador Project Phase 3

The award winning Transition Ambassador Project has become a landmark for the Waveney Youth Council. Additional to the already participating schools, we have now been able to offer and organise training for The Sir John Leman School and support their own Transition campaign. The training has taken place this Summer term 2017 by Access Community Trust and has engaged and enriched the ambassadors with the knowledge and confidence to aid the upcoming students. Previous aims have been to transform the Project so that the utilisation of Ambassadors can be unlocked all year round, and plans and discussions have enabled this to be a potential possibility. The Project Team, along with key local service providers, has been actively researching ways to ensure the sustainability of the Project for the future.

Feedback from current training has been encouraging and high in praise so far, particularly focusing on the changes made to the training sessions; an increase in interactive team activities and the use of multimedia resources. The Transition Ambassador Presentation Event will take place in July, seeing 72 students receiving certificates. Over 270 students have now gained training from this Project over 3 years, which we would like to consider a great achievement for the Youth Council. We hope to increase the amount of students for the Phase 3 programme, with an addition of Lowestoft Sixth Form College who will uphold a more pastoral and mentoring approach to new students.

Engaging student in current affairs and the future of the UK through Politics as a Priority

After seeing the result of the General Election, there has been a significant increase in the percentage of young people who voted. In 2015, only 43% of young people voted, whereas in 2017, 72% of young people voiced their vote. It has become clear that the engagement of young people is critical and has become a priority between Access Community Trust and the Waveney Youth Council to gain the interests of young people around Waveney. By working in partnership with Access, we have been able to put together a programme of political based events for students to attend. Such events included a Politics fair introducing local parties and other organisations (LGBT PRIDE for example) to over 100 High School students. Since
then, Schools have found an increase in interest for politics and has encouraged students to sign up for other events (including a Politics Question Time event). This goes to show the significance of the Waveney Youth Council’s partnership with Access and how effective events such as these can be. The political knowledge in young people gives a bright and intellectual atmosphere to the community and potentially the future.

**ESYPAG Holiday Activities Project**

The ongoing Holiday Activities Project has seen a major increase in the participation of young people across East Suffolk in positive activities. The result of the funding, provided by The East Suffolk Partnership, has seen £29,394.67 go towards 28 projects and activities that have taken place so far. This now leaves us with £20,605.33 to allocate to succeeding activities that will be approved by commissioning panel, which now consists of 8 young people: 4 from Waveney (2 of which are Waveney Youth Council members) and 4 from Suffolk Coastal. The next round will see the Commissioning Panel analysing and deciding activities to fund in the new academic year. This project involves support provided by WDC’s Active Communities Team and Suffolk County Council.

**National Youth Takeover Day 2016 and the plans for 2017**

November 2016 saw the Waveney Youth Council plan and carry out a local Health Services based Takeover Challenge at Riverside. This involved the Youth Council working with Health Providers including The Great Yarmouth and Waveney Clinical Commissioning Group and East Coast Community Healthcare. The day was set out as a challenge where the Schools competed against each other to make decisions about how best to allocate the budget for local Health Care services. This saw Beccles Free School on top, receiving Leisure Vouchers for Waterlane Leisure Centre. The other Schools also received prizes for taking part. Students were also able to find out the type of career opportunities available in the health sector. The event was well attended and received highly positive feedback from both Schools and organisations. The Council have started planning for the upcoming Takeover Challenge and will vote for their preferred focus in the July meeting.

**Links with local organisations**

We have always considered the Youth Council as a branching point for Schools to discover organisations to introduce into Schools and raise awareness of local activity in the community. Contacts and organisations include Suffolk Wildlife Trust, Lowestoft’s Third Crossing project group, WDC’s Planning Policy Team, Lowestoft Rising, Access Community Trust, The Lowestoft Cultural Education Partnership, school Nurses and various Youth Mental Health Service providers. The Council have benefited from these experiences, with Schools contacting such organisations and students having influential discussions in developing ideas that have been brought to us.
Conclusion

As you can see, the need for leadership and encouragement in the Youth Council is vital for young people in Waveney. This has stood out to me as a success for this year and I hope to see proof of this at the upcoming Annual General Meeting in September, which has moved from later in the school year due to the experimental thought of allowing a fresh new Council at the very start of the academic year.

The Projects have shone throughout this year as consistent and ongoing, travelling on new paths with new bright minds. We always strive to support Schools and are grateful for their support with us, without the Schools we wouldn’t have a Council. The links and partnerships we have across Waveney and beyond have become a key role in the Council and has encouraged us to grow. We hope to branch out to other organisations to hold a strong connection with local minds. I have no doubt that the Council will keep blossoming and continue to have a significant place in the Community.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank this committee for its ongoing support in our work.

Joe Flatt
Waveney Youth Council Chairman and student at Lowestoft Sixth Form College