



Cllr Sean Marshall
Dumfries and Galloway Council



So, what was it like?

It was exciting! I'd be really looking forward to logging on in the evening to see what messages I'd got, where the conversation was going. It was an enjoyable way to engage with young people. They'd put you on the spot and make you think, it was a challenge!

Did anything surprise you about taking part?

Probably the strength of feeling from the young people. They WANT to be listened to – I knew that young people feel no-one listens, but I was surprised at the intensity of it. They've got so much good stuff to put forward, so many ideas, but no-one's listening. It's frustrating for them. One great thing about 'I'm a Councillor' was that, because it's two weeks, councillors could get back to young people on things. We could go away and ask questions, raise issues and then come back and tell them what had happened. Much better than just a one-off meeting with young people, where they never know what happens because of it. Here they could see that we were really listening and doing things, it's an ongoing conversation.

What would you say to a councillor who's thinking about getting involved?

Do it! You will enjoy it. I'll challenge any councillor to take part and not say afterwards that they enjoyed it and got a lot out of it.

So, how did it feel to win?

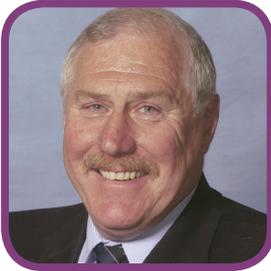
I was thrilled to win! I felt really proud. My son's got the trophy in his bedroom, he insisted on taking it. I think he's proud of his Dad.

And what difference has it made?

Winning really added emphasis to what I'd been doing already, it's been a vindication of my youth engagement work. It's underlined for me that young people should be involved in all community decisions, because they are part of the community too.

I chair a community meeting in Eastriggs and I've pressed for representation from local schools. I've also been talking to the youth worker to come up with new ways of contacting and engaging young people and youth groups. Committee meetings can be off-putting – 'I'm a Councillor' and things like it use novel, imaginative ways of communicating.

I've been working with a group of young people who've campaigned for a skate park, which is now being built. Those young people have really got involved, the project has such an impetus now. We've got youth representatives on our community panel, they were young people from the skate park group – they've seen how getting involved can work out and make a difference, so now they are getting involved more. We have to give young people a way in, and then they've got so much energy and so much to give.



**Pat Todd, Canterbury City
Councillor and Herne Bay High
Student Welfare Manager**



What did you think of the 'I'm a Councillor' experience?

I found the experience rejuvenating. It gave us the chance to maintain a dialogue with the kind of young people who we wouldn't usually get to talk to - the technical side of things really suited them.

For all our talk about empowering youngsters, so often nothing is carried forward, which is a frustrating aspect of being a councillor. In our society a tiny minority of young people get the worst publicity, and we lose sight of fact that 99% of young people are cracking people who are going to turn into super adults. Working in a forum like this gives you back the enthusiasm, reminds you why you're working with young people in the first place. It's easy to lose sight of that.

Once I got into the event the young people were incredibly honest and forthright. Young people don't let you get away with politician's answers – they want proper answers. That keeps you on your toes, makes you think more about who you are, where you are, where you're going.

As a councillor you've got to be committed to take the event on – you've got to do it to the best of your ability. That meant being up past midnight sometimes to make sure answers were on the web. I was very tired by the end!

What did you learn from the event?

That you can't pull the wool over young people's eyes – they're more discerning than a lot of people give them credit for. We as politicians need to be reminded of that. They are the electorate of the future.

It has highlighted the need for Citizenship to be part of the curriculum. Anything to do with technology is a great teaching tool especially if done properly – and I thought I'm a Councillor was. I'll definitely be pushing my school to get more involved this year, and earlier.

What has happened since the event?

The event helped us find out more about what young people want – like a 50 metre swimming pool – and then make enquiries and feed back information to them about what we're planning. The city council has a policy of supplying some facilities for skateboarding, but talking to the young people just highlighted it again – reminded us that this is what young people want and that we should keep it at the forefront of the agenda. Very recently, following a lot of lobbying by Councillors and a petition of 800 signatures organised by young people, the Executive gave £45,000 towards a skatepark on the coast at Whitstable – action at last!

We started planning an International Youth Parliament around the time I'm a Councillor happened. We brought over students from schools in Russia, Sweden, Denmark, Hungary, Italy, and they spent time debating issues that had come up in I'm a Councillor – like the environment, work, migration – then came up with a list of motions that have been sent to MEPs.