

I'm a Councillor, Get me out of here!

Briefing paper

1) Brief description of activity

1.1 I'm a Councillor, Get me out of here! is an online event for getting young people and local councillors talking, and getting young people engaged with local politics.

1.2 Up to six councillors from each council volunteer, and they compete to be 'Youth Champion' for the area. Local young people, at school or in youth groups, 'meet' the councillors online on the www.bigvote.org.uk website, ask them questions and then vote for the candidate of their choice. The councillor with the least votes gets evicted, in successive rounds, until only one is left to be crowned 'Youth Champion'.

1.3 The event is supported by a comprehensive set of teaching materials on local democracy, with lesson plans, quizzes and information sheets and has been praised by Ofsted. The event runs 4th – 15th Oct 2010, to coincide with European Local Democracy Week.

2) Benefits to the council

- Young people learn about, and participate in local democracy.
- Councillors gain insight into youth issues.
- Councils improve the relationships with schools.
- Positive press coverage

2.1 Young people in the area gain a clearer understanding of the role and work of the council and its councillors. They also get to have their say and feel involved in the local community, listened to by the council and start to get the 'voting habit'.

2.2 Councillors become more informed about key issues which are of interest and concern to young people in the area. They also develop their skills at communicating with young people.

2.3 The Council will create positive lines of communication with schools in the area and cement existing links.

2.4 Positive press: In the organiser's post-event evaluation survey, 2007, 93% of council staff got coverage in local papers for the event and 35% got coverage on local radio. Young people, combined with the catchy format, provides a nice hook for local press to run positive stories about the council.

3) Who needs to be involved locally?

- Competing councillors
- Council officers
- Buy-in from teachers

3.1 Councillors: Up to six councillors can compete, spending about 30 minutes a day answering questions. Party politics are rarely an issue during the event. The council may want to put forward a political mix, or simply recruit councillors on a first-come first-served basis.

3.2 Council officers: Usually lead officer will be someone from Democratic Services or Communications, but it can be very useful to also have someone from education or youth services involved. A multi-disciplinary team has a greater range of expertise on hand, which saves a lot of effort. Council staff will need to liaise with schools, councillors and local press,

but suggested press releases and other promotional material, including leaflets for teachers and councillor briefing packs will be supplied. Contacting teachers and getting them on board will be the biggest task for council staff, most of the event is run by the organisers.

3.3 Teachers: Teacher's buy-in is crucial to the success of the project, but it doesn't need many schools in the area to participate to make it a success.

4) Wider issues addressed

A key factor in the future health of local government is the promotion of effective citizenship. Nationally, greater emphasis is being placed on councils to promote the involvement of young people in their communities. A recent key government document, 'Promoting Effective Citizenship and Community Empowerment' stated, "*Involving young people (in council decision-making) is vital for the future health of local democracy...[and] is no longer an optional extra*".

5) The costs

£2,500 + VAT, per council. This includes website, moderation, teacher and councillor packs, promotional pack, support before and during event and post event evaluation reports.

6) Successful outcomes

The event causes a general improvement in engagement with young people and relationships with schools – rather than specific, concrete projects. Some examples:-

- **Teachers have reported** students setting up their own current affairs society after the event, or many students joining local youth councils or political groups.
- **68% of young people** visited the website at home, in their own time, after being introduced to it at school (2008 event).
- **93% of councillors** said they enjoyed taking part.
- **West Oxfordshire Borough Council** - reported a much better relationship with schools, including schools asking to borrow the council's polling booths to run their own school elections.
- **Restormel Borough Council** – Cllr Dave Matthews said, "It's very clear that youth issues have moved right up councillor's agendas since the event."
- **One council officer said**, "The improvement has been in the relationship between Elected Members and schools. They are now feeling very positive about doing things with schools."

7) Timetable

June / July	Best time to recruit schools
July	Organisers send out Teacher Packs
Late Jul - Early Sept	Summer Holidays, teachers unavailable
Early Sept	Start publicity
13 th Sept	Site live for councillors to put up manifesto
20 th Sept	Site live for teachers to introduce topic
4 th Oct	Event begins – two weeks of questioning and voting
15 th Oct	Event ends – winner announced!

A detailed checklist and suggested timetable for participation will be supplied by the organisers.