



# EMBRACING THE APPOINTMENT OF YOUTH REPRESENTATIVES

Deborah Phillips, Town Clerk to Pontardawe TC in North Wales explains how the inclusion of the Youth within Council has revolutionised the Council’s ability to both interact with the young people and to hear their voice.

It is vitally important for the future that young people form part of today’s decision making process as, of course, the decisions made today will affect them as adults in the future.

The Town Council initially created a policy and procedure to advertise the posts, identify and appoint candidates and made a point of asking the Youth Representatives their opinions during Council meetings to ensure that their views were fully understood. Representatives also discuss issues with their peers and obtain feedback that can be brought to Council during future meetings.

Our Youth Representatives have taken a major part in the development of projects. For example, it was identified that residents were unaware of the many activities available for children and young people in the area so the Town Council in partnership with two other Community Councils created an ‘Out of School’ Activities brochure.

Harri, our Youth Rep, looked at the brochure produced by the Council and gave it a young person make over, with original artwork from the local Community School together with a dedicated web site designed by him.

Our aim was to provide a one point hub for information that is easy to update and that can be used by children and parents alike.

Without Harri’s input the direction of a project created for young people would not have reached its target audience and would not have been in a format that appealed to young people.

This is just one project that has become far more effective by including a young person’s view, there have been many more instances where feedback from the youth has produced projects that achieved their goals because of their input.

Harri has this to say on the matter .....

“I am now nearing the end of my final year as Youth Representative and in the November meeting I told Council what a great experience it had been to be a member of such a pioneering council. Now I want to share my story with as many people as possible.

As a Youth Representative I learnt and developed many skills and could share best practices on a national basis. The Council even gave me free rein on a project, establishing an activities hub for the local community online ([www.govalley.info](http://www.govalley.info)). I could practice my marketing skills which helped me with my Business Studies progression at college; I also became more social media literate which helped me with raising the profile of youth engagement within the Pontardawe area.

I completed three terms as a Youth Representative and really have grown as a person and understanding the local community. I know work for an organisation called Neath Port Talbot Children’s Rights Unit as the ‘Young Trustee Project Coordinator’, where my role is to actively encourage youth participation. I believe that Pontardawe Town Council is at the very top of the ‘Participation Ladder’ where they treat Young people equally allowing them to take part in discussions when council makes important decisions. I have also worked in partnership with One Voice Wales, Pontardawe Town Council and The Children’s Rights Unit to produce a guide for Town and Community Councils and how they can actively encourage Youth Participation and the different mechanisms they can utilise.

I hope that Communities can work together, no matter what age, gender, race or religion someone is: we can be global citizens and work in partnership to grow as individuals and make our communities great.”

The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 ss.118-121, uniquely gives community and town councils in Wales the power to appoint up to two youth representatives (aged 16 to 25) to join the council to represent the interests of young people who live, work or receive education or training in the area.

## Fact File:

	Pontardawe	
	Population:	5267
	Precept	£163,700
	No. of councillors: 16 and up to two additional Youth Representatives	
	No of staff:	4