

**Minutes of the meeting of the Sevenoaks Youth Council
Held on 13th November 2024**

at House in The Basement, In the basement of the Stag Community Arts Centre, London Road,
Sevenoaks, TN13 1ZZ,

Meeting Commenced: 6.00 p.m.

Meeting Concluded: 7.10 p.m.

Present:

Youth Council Members:

Aanya Sidhu		Lizzie Hunt	Absent
Harry King	Present	Cristian Hunter-Garcia	Absent
Simba Li	Present	Sharma Ishwar	Apologies
Aryanna Mahdavi Ardestani	Present	Miko Keen	Apologies
Catherine Barden De Leon	Present	Riddley McDermott	Present
Rosie Blackmore	Present	Madeleine Politzer	Absent
Dexter Buhmann	Present	Elif Sabanci	Present
Elena-Teodora Dragoi	Apologies	Jospeh Soanes	Present
Ayush Gautam	Absent	Ines Wang	Absent
Maya Goodrich	Present	Aditya Vara	Absent
Bea Hayward	Absent		

In attendance: Georgina Jackson, Responsible Finance Officer & Deputy Town Clerk; Daren Mountain, Manager of House in the Basement Youth Café; Ieuan Chandler-Wilson, Youth Committee Clerk,

1. Apologies for Absence

Received as shown above.

2. Election of the Chair

Four youth councillors placed their names forward for the position of the Chair of the Youth Council 2024-2025. A vote was held with each Youth Councillor having one vote for the candidate of their choice.

Resolved: That Simba Li be elected as Chair.

Simba took to the chair and invited nominations for the Vice-Chair and Treasurer positions.

3. Election of the Vice-Chair

Four Youth Councillors placed their names forward for the position of Vice-Chair of the Youth Council 2024-2025. A vote was held with each Youth Councillor having one vote for the candidate of their choice.

Resolved: That Rosie Blackmore be elected as Vice-Chair.

4. Election of the Treasurer

Two Youth Councillors Placed their names forward for the position of Treasurer of the Youth Council 2024-2025. A vote was held with each Youth Councillor having one vote for the candidate of their choice.

Resolved: That Harry King be elected as Treasurer.

5. Minutes of the Previous Meeting of the Youth Council held on 11th September 2024

The Youth Council received a summarised report from the Chair of the Youth Council.

RESOLVED: To receive and adopt the minutes of the meeting of the Youth Council held on 11th September 2024.

6. Finance Report

Harry read the general income and expenditure report, noting that £18 had been raised for their chosen charity Friends For Families during a Bake sale held at the Sevenoaks Bike Festival on the 21st of September.

The Chair noted that the Youth Council had not spent any money and open suggestions from the Youth Councillors as to what they would like to spend some of the money on. Some of the ideas suggested were:

- Advertising for the Youth Council,
- Advertising for House in the Basement,

It was noted that the Youth Council would like to elect a Social Media Chair to help with promoting the Youth Council.

RESOLVED: To note that the current balance for 2024/25 was £2,220.10

7. Current Matters Report

RESOLVED: To accept the Current Matters Report.

8. Introduction from PCSO Tim Darling

The Youth Council received a talk from the Public Community Safety Officer Tim Darling and Constable Claire Harrison. Tim outlined that both he and Claire were part of the Sevenoaks District Child Centre Policing team, working with the local beat officers as an early intervention measure. They are trying to engage with young people under the age of eighteen to build positive community relationships between the local police and young people within the town.

Tim reported they have been attending local schools recently and giving talks on bullying as part of the anti-bullying week and talking about social media's impact on young people.

9. House in the Basement Youth Café (HiTB), Managers report:

The Youth Council received and noted Daren Mountains report. It was also noted that the Youth Council are invited to attend House in the Basement Youth Café.

RESOLVED: To receive and note the report from Daren Mountain, Manager of HiTB

10. Craft Resources for House in the Basement

The Youth Council received a request to fund craft resources for House in the Basement's Cricut Joy for a total of £76.98.

Resolved: To fund the purchase of craft materials for House in the Basement at £76.98. It was agreed that the money would be allocated from the Youth Council Budget.

11. Mental Health Survey

The Youth Council received and noted the results from the Youth Mental Health Survey. The Chair noted that 25% of young people who took part in the survey had answered that they were unsure if they had a good school-life balance.

12. Vote 16

The Youth Council heard from guest speakers: Gabriel, Moyo and Elie from Sevenoaks School on the Vote 16 initiative which is a student-led campaign, aiming to lower the voting age within the UK from 18 to 16. The Youth Councillors heard that this objective had been placed in the Labour manifesto but was not mentioned in the King's speech.

The Youth Council heard that 13 other Countries in Europe like Scotland have lowered their voting ages from 18 to 16. Scotland lowered the voting age in 2015. It was noted that during a survey 60% of young people in Scotland say they talk to their friends and family about political issues.

It was noted that there was a petition for young people to sign on the British Youth Council, this has since been taken down. However, there is a live petition on the National Union of Students website.

13. Sevenoaks Christmas Lights Switch On

The Youth Council noted that the Sevenoaks Christmas Lights Switch will be taking place on Saturday 30th of November 2024 starting from 3.00 pm to 5.30 pm, with a road closure in place from 1.30 pm to 6.30 pm.

14. Ideas for Instagram posts

The Youth Council put forward several different ideas for future Instagram posts.

- Advertising for the Youth Council,
- Advertising for House in the Basement,
- Advertising for Vote 16,

15. Date of Next Meeting

RESOLVED:

- Wednesday 15th January 2025 at 6 pm in the Town Council Chamber
- Wednesday 05th March 2025 at 6 pm at House in The Basement

There being no further business the Chair closed the meeting.

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Good evening, everyone. We are Vote 16 – a student led campaign aiming to lower the legal voting age within the whole of the UK to 16. // This idea has been around for a while now; (actually ever since Cuba lowered the voting to 16 in 1976) - but more recently, and, more importantly, the 2024 General Election. The Labour party, then opposition, had it in their manifesto – their pledge – it said; to quote: *“We will increase the engagement of young people in our vibrant democracy, by giving 16- and 17-year-olds the right to vote in all elections.”*. However, this key point within their manifesto failed to appear in the King's Speech and subsequently failed to be discussed in Parliament. //

We want to change this. We want to raise support from young people around the country; from schools and institutions to politicians and policy makers – to raise and push this issue back into Parliament, and to get a change in law, to lower the voting age in the whole of the UK to 16. // Currently, we have cross party support from both the youth section of the Labour and Liberal Democrats, along with academics such as Dr Yan Eichhorn, from Edinburgh University.

Lowering the voting age has proven to have many benefits – especially prevalent in countries such as Austria (which passed the law in 2007) and Scotland (where the final bill was passed in 2015, ready for 2016 Scottish Parliamentary Elections). In both these, along with the 13 other countries in Europe that have done the same, it has been shown to instil confidence, inclusion, and motives young people to take political initiative. //

But why should it be done? There are 3 key reasons; //

(CP – 16 too young) Firstly, at 16 you gain fundamental rights. You can get a job, you can pay taxes, so why can't you vote? By 16, you fully take part in society, and even may be contributing to it, yet you still don't have the most important right of someone in society living in a democracy – the right to vote. //

(CP – 16 year olds think politics too complicated / unbothered) Some 16 year olds can be their own worst critics. // They often think politics is too complicated for them to understand. *“Around 55% of youth in Scotland find politics about as hard to understand as their peers elsewhere in the UK. But what has changed since the voting age was lowered, is that young people in Scotland appear more confident in dealing with political issues.”* // A contributing factor could be that around 60% of them say they talk to their friends or family about political issues, leading to a remarkably high 75% turnout for the 2014 referendum on independence. // Compare this to just one-third of young people within the UK who do the same. // Lowering the voting age would increase discussion within

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this demographic, leading to young people becoming more engaged with politics.

Secondly, this is step towards maturity and taking responsibility. // During any general election or local one, you are taking responsibility for deciding on who will get your support. // A survey co founded by the National Citizen Service revealed 70% of young people did not know the name of their MP and 59% were even unaware of which party they belong to. This is poor for a democracy like ours. //

This comes down to an issue of education. On the national curriculum within the UK, there are no mandatory civic education lessons. //

(CP – Mental immaturity) *These 16 to 17 year olds are not informed, precisely because they aren't allowed to vote and therefore there is no point for them in educating themselves until they have the opportunity to use their knowledge by voting. We would argue that the extension of the vote should be accompanied by a rigorous programme of civic education lessons, and therefore it is important that we allowed them to vote while they are still in school, being given these lessons. //*

(CP – Mental immaturity) A common point of misconception is that 16-17 year olds have an “undeveloped pre-frontal cortex” and therefore cannot vote. However, I ask you; what happens on your 18th birthday? Does your brain, suddenly overnight completely develop and all your emotion suddenly gets fixed and you become able to vote the next day? No. Obviously not. Becoming an adult does not happen overnight on your 18th birthday. Many adults are also not well enough informed, but we don't suggest they can't vote; so why is it any different with 16 or 17 year olds? Our democratic right is not underpinned by one's maturity to make informed political choices. //

(CP – Mental immaturity) Furthermore, research conducted by a Laurence Steinberg – a professor, specialising in adolescent psychological development argues 16 to 17 year olds have the same ‘cold cognition’ (which includes working memory, attention, language processing and more importantly, decision making ability) maturity as adults. This is what is necessary to make an informed vote. //

(CP – Lower turnout due to exam pressure) *Additionally, 16 to 17 year olds have the highest turnout. // A case study done by the European Commission shows voter turnout for the 2017 Austrian National Council Election to be 90.3% of 16 to 17 year olds, the highest of any age category. This could have been accounted due to, civic education lessons that are mandatory within Austrian schools – showing the full benefit of incorporating them into a national curriculum. //*

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(CP – Lower turnout due to exam pressure) Scholars have hypothesised that “a reduction of the voting age could actually have a beneficial effect on the future trends in turnout. Giving young people the chance to take part in democracy, during a time at which they are still, for the most part, in secondary school, living in a stable community, and with their family, does cause higher rates of turnout. “Young people would then learn the habit of voting, which over time will lead to rising aggregate turnout levels.” //

Thirdly, this is about our future. // In the last general election, there were no flagship policies from either of the two main parties – Conservative or Labour – directly benefiting 16-25 year olds. Instead, policies were pitched towards larger demographics, primarily consisting of middle aged to older people, which both parties knew would have a high consistent voter turnout. // By lowering the voting age to 16, we would influence government policies, bringing more attention to issues that affect our demographic due to the new franchise of voters. //

(CP – 16-17 year olds have lack of political knowledge, therefore easily influenced) A study conducted by Edinburgh University showed that “social class differences in relation to political engagement were less pronounced amongst 16 and 17 year olds in Scotland”, rather, “young Scots of all social classes were equally likely to turn out to vote”. Additionally, the variety of information sources used by the electorate were considerably higher than their counterparts within the UK. 60% of young Scots said they used at least 3 different news sources, compared to only 43% of their peers in the UK. // This shows that by lowering the voting age, we will increase engagement, leading to 16 and 17 year olds making more informed political decisions. //

Implementation

obviously, the main implementation is quite simple - lowering the voting age so that anyone may choose to vote from the age of 16. however, to make this change more sustainable, there is an additional facet - critical thinking classes.

critical thinking classes are in themselves quite beneficial. it's an extremely important life skill - 93% of employers have reported considering analytical ability when looking to hire. students that take these classes learn to evaluate not only what they're told by others, but also their own thoughts, beliefs and actions.

as part of our campaign, we're seeking to make them a mandatory part of the curriculum to educate our youth politically. this ensures they're properly informed and equipped for voting correctly and safely.

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We recently ran a survey asking people why they thought the voting age shouldn't be lowered, and the top reason was the fact that young people are susceptible to influence. However, with these classes, that will no longer be an issue. Students will learn to criticise every opinion given to them and assess how true it really is.

There are two different ways these classes can be carried out - discreetly or explicitly. An explicit way of doing it would be specifically having classes teach core critical thinking or something to that effect. A discreet way of doing it would be incorporating the skills into classes students are already taking. Explicit instruction is easier to regulate on a national level, whereas discreet instruction is easier to implement in already busy students' lives.

Conclusion

And finally, a question for you – as a youth council, I'm sure you see this as one of the largest imbalances on our democracy? //

I'm sure you see the underlying issue here – if the youth can't vote, politicians will never have any incentive to propose policies which benefit our generation and future generations to come. //

We are the future of the country, yet our opinions are not acknowledged in any way, we have no political voice. // Therefore, how can we ever assume our society is equal and that our democracy is based on fairness and equality? //

By lowering the voting age, we are empowering the next generation with a vote, to change our future. //

// END //