

YOUTH FORUM

1. What is the Youth Forum?

The primary aim of the Youth Forum is to connect young people to the political decision making process by providing an opportunity to discuss and listen to their views on issues important to them. The Forum also has an educative function, giving delegates some idea of the work done by their Local Council, MPs and MEPs.

The Youth Forum was established in 1996, it was originally an initiative of the Council's Community Safety Group, and sought to establish young people's views on drug issues. The Forum's success helped establish an ongoing dialogue with young people, now covering a wide variety of issues

Four Forums are held each year, to which up to eight representatives from each school in the Vale are invited. (This includes Didcot and the European School as many of the pupils live in the Vale).

The Forums combine presentations or talks, open discussion and question time with invited panels (such as MPs). The Forum is attended by local Councillors, MPs and MEPs, who often take challenging questions from the representatives.

In the past Youth Forum delegates have had the opportunity to tour the Houses of Parliament and visit the European Parliament in Brussels.

2. How are delegates selected to attend the Youth Forum?

Schools decide who attends. They may be elected School Councillors or students who have been identified as having a particular interest in attending.

Representatives are encouraged to attend meetings for the whole year and many continue from year 9 through to year 13.

3. Who is eligible to attend?

The Council invites all Schools (State and Independent) in or around the Vale of the White Horse to send up to eight representatives from years 9, 10, 11 and 12 (aged 14 – 18).

4. What is discussed at the meetings?

The Youth Forum exists to discuss topics of interest to the young people who attend; these may be local, national or European issues.

The Forum is also the Council's main method of consultation with its younger residents on issues that it is responsible for, e.g. leisure facilities, environmental issues etc.

However consultations are also carried out on behalf of other organisations such as the Police or Oxfordshire County Council (e.g. Anti-Bullying Strategy for Oxfordshire - 2009).

The agenda is set by Councillors and young people at planning meetings, but issues are often proposed by young people at previous meetings.

5. Is it political?

At the Youth Forum students are encouraged to discuss political issues, but they are never pushed towards a particular political view. Every effort is made to include speakers from as wide a range of political parties as appropriate

The Youth Forum has a working group of Councillors from both political parties represented on the Council who make decisions about how the Youth Forum is run.

6. How do the views of young people expressed at the Youth Forum make an impact on Council decisions?

Members from the Council's Executive, as well as MPs attend the Forums and hear the views of Young people first hand. This gives a unique opportunity for Young people to voice their opinions to those that are in decision making positions.

In addition, notes taken at Youth Forum meetings are sent to the relevant officers of the Council for their consideration.

The Youth Forum is used by the Council to increase young peoples' input to specific consultation such as the Crime Audit. In the past such consultation has contributed to various Council plans such as leisure provision and Police annual plans.

7. Where is the Youth Forum held?

This varies from meeting to meeting but will be in venues in the Vale, sometimes sponsored by organisations such as Williams F1, Rutherford Laboratory, Youth Centres or one of the Independent Schools. It is important that you register on arrival and do not leave during the meeting without the permission of the Youth Development Co-ordinator.

8. I have been invited to attend the Youth Forum, what should I wear?

Casual clothes, there is no need to dress up or wear School Uniform apart from the YEAR 9 meeting which finishes at 1pm and students are expected to return to school.

9. What should I bring to the meeting?

You do not need to bring anything.

All pens, paper etc will be provided as well as lunch and refreshments throughout the day.

10. What is the Vale Youth Cabinet?

Twelve young people were elected to the Vale Youth Cabinet, a sub-group of the Youth Forum, in October 2007. They gave a presentation to the Vale's Councillors about their priorities, one of which was to set up a youth magazine to promote the positive image of young people. After applying to the Youth Opportunity Fund in May 2008 they were awarded nearly £15,000 to produce 3 issues, distributed free to young people in the Vale.

VYM (Vale Youth Magazine) was successfully launched in October 2008. A new group of young people were elected to the Youth Cabinet at the Youth Forum in December 2008. Their priorities for the year are to continue to produce VYM, support the work of the Members of the Youth Parliament in Oxfordshire campaigning for cheaper transport for young people and participate in Council consultations. They also have the opportunity to be part of decision making at a County level through groups such as the Oxfordshire Youth Parliament.