Falkirk Council Youth Engagement Review

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Summary

A review of how effectively Falkirk Council engages with young people was conducted in March 2018 by the Communications and Participation Unit. The purpose of the review was to:

- Learn how to better engage with young people;
- Find out how young people want to engage with the Council;
- Identify barriers to engagement; and
- Advise on the introduction of a youth council.

An online survey of 12-25 year olds, living in the Falkirk Council area, was carried out in March 2018. The survey was hosted on Citizens Space and was designed to identify *if* and *how* young people want to engage with the Council. It received 627 responses – making it a statistically significant sample.

The key findings of the survey are summarised below:

- 82% of young people agree or strongly agree that they would like to be involved in making decisions that affect them and their local area;
- They have a particular interest in influencing Schools and Education, Jobs, Careers and Training and Mental Health. They are least interested in influencing Bins, Rubbish and Recycling and Community Safety;
- 53% of young people agree or strongly agree they can influence decisions affecting their local area;
- 37% of young people agree or strongly agree that their participation in youth engagement activities would have influence over decisions made by the Council;
- 15% of young people have been involved in Council youth engagement activities;
- 30% of young people are interested in joining the Council's Citizen Panel.
- 28% of young people are interested in joining a youth council;
- 70% of young people said their preferred method of youth engagement is online surveys. Their least preferred method is youth groups;
- 29% of young people know how to get involved in Council youth engagement activities;
- The biggest barriers to involvement are: not knowing how to get involved; not feeling confident enough to get involved; not having enough spare time; and not feeling knowledgeable enough to get involved;
- Young people would prefer to receive information about changes and developments in the Falkirk Council area through: school and college; email; Facebook; and Twitter.

Based on the evidence gathered in this report, it is recommended that the Council:

- Develop an online survey platform, similar to the Citizens Panel. Further consultation with young people is needed to determine how this can be designed and rolled out effectively;
- Promote youth engagement activities more effectively using the online channels which are preferred by young people. The Council should better familiarise itself with social media platforms, such as Facebook and Snapchat, and identify how they can better used;
- Work closely with schools and Forth Valley College to provide young people opportunities to get involved in youth engagement;
- Use social media to keep young people informed of changes and developments in their local areas;
- Increase young people's knowledge of local democracy and the issues affecting their communities so that they can more confidently get involved in youth engagement activities;
- Regularly ask young people what issues are important to them and design engagement activities around this. This may be achieved through an annual survey through which an engagement agenda is developed;
- Manage the expectations of young people by being honest about the scope of their influence over decision making processes.

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Youth Engagement Review

1. Introduction

In response to a motion put forward by the Council, to establish a Falkirk area youth council, a review of how effectively Falkirk Council engages with young people was conducted by the Communications and Participation Unit. The primary purpose of this review was to establish how well the Council is engaging with young people. It also aimed to: learn how to better engage with young people; find out how young people want to engage with the Council; identify barriers to engagement; and advise on the introduction of a youth council.

The review began in March 2018. It was, largely, guided by the results of an online survey of young people, aged 12-25, living in the Falkirk Council Area. The survey was designed to identify *if* and *how* young people want to engage with the Council.

The results of the review are set out in this report.

1.1 Project objectives

- To establish how effectively the Council is engaging with young people;
- To learn how to better engage with young people living in the Falkirk Council area;
- To find out how young people would like to engage with the Council, if at all;
- Identify any barriers preventing young people from engaging with the Council;
- To engage with 587 young people living in the Falkirk Council area, in order to achieve a statistically significant sample size;
- To engage with a range of young people in terms of age, socioeconomic background and protected characteristics;
- To use the views of young people to inform any decisions made about the Council's approach to youth engagement and the establishment of a Youth Council;
- To ensure that young people feel they have been listened to, by sharing the outcomes of their contributions;
- To make a recommendation about the establishment of a Falkirk area youth council and/or other youth engagement activities.

2. Setting the context

2.1 What is a youth council?

The term "youth council" is used to describe a decision making body which is focussed on youth issues in local communities (Ausberger et al. 2018). It 'refers to those places and forums within local organisations and public systems where youth are meaningfully involved in significant decisions regarding the goals, design and implementation of the community's work' (Zeldin et al., 2007, 77). Youth councils 'connect young people to policy makers' and are usually formalised in the governance structure of the organisation in which they sit (Collins et al. 2016, 141).

Youth councils are usually established by adults and are largely a top down engagement approach. Often they are formed as an "answer" to the absence of participation opportunities for young people, and not in response to a demand from young people themselves (Matthews, 2001). Their functions include advocacy, citizenship education, preventative education and recreation, however, there have been 'substantial advances in understanding the potential of youth councils to support youth development and youth focused policy making' (Ausberger et al. 2017, 189).

The success of a youth council is dependent on the reasons as to why it was formed. There is a danger that councils may create youth councils as a political concession, or as a way to fulfil a performance indicator, without sufficiently thinking through roles and responsibilities (Matthews, 2001). When establishing a youth council, it is important to outline clearly: why the Council seeks to involve young people; the scope of the youth council's influence (thereby making it clear the impact it can have on decision making processes); who, at officer level, will lead the youth council; a network of supporting staff across the Council who will support the youth council; and a way to monitor and evaluate the outcomes of young people's involvement (British Youth Council, 2010). Agenda setting is also a matter of high importance. Matthews (2001, 311), notes:

> There is a need to examine how issues are identified and negotiated if adult-directed groups are not to obfuscate the real concerns of young people. This conflict is all the more problematic where the adults are

concerned are "experts" on youth matters as there is potential for them to propose what they consider to be the "best interests" of young people rather than enabling young people to decide for themselves and have a sense of ownership over the process.

What is more, it is important that a commitment to resources and funding is made, as without this most youth councils are unlikely to survive in the long term (Matthews, 2001).

One of the main critiques of youth councils is the question of their impact, given that youth councils often provide a restricted role for young people in policy making. There is no statutory duty to measure the outcomes of youth councils and often they are used to distribute information or communicate ideas to young people, rather than involving young people in decision making (Bessant, 2004). In this way, youth councils can become little more than a performance. The demand for community engagement is such that local government are aware that they need to be *seen* to be consulting with communities (Tisdall et al. 2008). A youth council risks becoming, therefore, a "box-ticking" exercise.

The matter of representativeness is another issue that needs to be carefully addressed. The young people who are most eager to join a youth council may not represent the diversity of the community at large. Even when elected, it is unlikely that youth councillors are representative of young people, in terms of age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, religion, (dis)ability, class and sexuality (Matthews, 2001). Indeed, youth councils 'can actually *disempower* young people in an area if they only represent a certain section of the young population' (Fitzpatrick at al., 1998, 20). Addressing the diversity of a youth council is important if it is not to be open to the accusations of elitism (Matthews, 2001).

2.2 What is youth participation?

The participation of children and young people is a right protected by the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Article 12 states that children and young people have the right 'to have opinions and for these opinions to matter. It says that the opinions of children and young people should be considered when people make decisions about things that involve them, and they shouldn't be

dismissed out of hand on the grounds of age. It also says children and young people should be given the information they need to make good decisions' (Children & Young People's Commissioner Scotland, 2018).

Youth participation is, thus, a process of involving young people in the decisions that affect their lives. It necessitates the active engagement and genuine influence of young people, not a passive role in adult led agencies and organisations. Young people are, thus, considered competent citizens, rather than passive recipients of services. Youth participation is measured, therefore, not by the numbers of young people involved but by the extent to which the contributions of young people have a real effect on decision making (Checkoway, 2011).

Various arguments have been made for increasing youth participation. These are best summarised by Sinclair and Franklin (2000), who argue youth participation:

1. Upholds children's rights;
2. Fulfils legal responsibilities;
3. Improves services;
4. Improves decision making;
5. Improves democratic processes;
6. Promotes the protection of children and young people;
7. Improves the skills of children and young people;
8. Improves the self-esteem of children and young people.

The first two reasons appeal to the international legislation on the rights of the child already discussed above. Reasons three and four relate to consumerism and service user involvement in which young people are recognised as consumers and service users in the same way as adults are. Reason five addresses concerns that young people, and the public more generally, are disengaged from formal democratic processes. Here, political and civic engagement is seen as a duty or responsibility and promoted via programmes of citizenship education for young people. Reasons six to eight concern the wellbeing and development of children and young people. Personal development, in terms of skills and self-esteem, is identified as a potential

benefit of youth participation which will extend to adulthood. Such arguments are formed along the lines of social investment, in which it is argued that an early investment in childhood and adolescence will improve outcomes in adulthood (Tisdall et al., 2008).

2.3 Policy Context

Since the 1990s, the idea of community engagement has become increasingly embedded in Western political thought. Many Western governments support greater community participation as part of a (re)framing of modern citizenship, in which it is argued that increased participation will empower communities. Governments regularly develop and implement policies which show their commitment to public consultation and expand opportunities for communities to have their say on policy, legislation and services (Bessant, 2004).

The idea of community engagement is common in the liberal-democratic tradition which characterises Western democracy. In its current form, it can be accredited to the "Third Way" politics – blending economic liberalism with a commitment to social justice -   which won favour in the 1990s (Bessant, 2004). Today it is common for governments, of all ideologies, to combine neoliberal fiscal policy with social policy based on the ideas of social cohesion, equity and inclusion, citizenship, regeneration and "community spirit" – see, for example, the Localism Act 2011 in England, or the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015.

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 identifies community engagement as an important factor in building a fairer and more prosperous society. The Act recommends that communities should be at the centre of public service delivery and policy making:

> The voices of communities themselves, especially those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, are integral to successful community planning. Their needs and aspirations, and their own capacity to make change happen (with support where needed), are reflected in the local priorities the [Council] sets… - *(Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015)*

According to the Act, community engagement is an important element of public service reform at a local level. The Act focusses on issues of socioeconomic inequality and how they may be tackled collaboratively through preventative and early intervention approaches. One of the main aims of the Act is to promote citizenship by building the capacity of communities to participate effectively in decision making.

The Community Empowerment Act does not acknowledge or address, however, the many ways, - social, legal and cultural – in which young people's participation is obstructed. These include:

- The voting age is sixteen for Scottish Parliament and Scottish local government elections, and eighteen for general elections;
- Young people routinely experience various kinds of unequal economic policies. The National Minimum Wage, for example, is lower for young people aged below the age of twenty-five, meaning that young people do not always receive equal pay for equal work. What is more, Local Housing Allowance is capped for young people, without children, under the age of thirty-five. Young people are, thus, more dependent that any other generation before them. They delay leaving their family home and buying their own, starting a family, and entering full-time employment. Increasingly, more young people are entering higher education, lengthening financial dependence on the government and/or parents. Transitions from youth to adulthood are, thus, postponed, creating a quasi-citizenship in which young people are isolated politically, socially and economically (Sloam, 2008; Mycock and Tonge, 2012);
- 11.9% of young people, aged 16-24, are unemployed, compared to 4.3% of people aged 16-64 (Office of National Statistics, 2018). This suggests that many young people are economically inactive. Increasingly, young people are employed in part time and casual contracts which offer little in terms of job security and income stability (International Monetary Fund, 2017). This is a significant barrier to participation in social, economic and political activities;
- More than one in four children of Scotland's children are living in poverty (Child Poverty Action Group, 2018). As a result, many young people face barriers to participating in political and civic activities, due to lack of finances;

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- Young people are often removed or barred from public areas, facilities and retail/hospitality premises due to claims that they are inherently antisocial. This increases tensions between adults and young people and reinforces negative attitudes towards young people (Bessant, 2004).

The failure to acknowledge the obstacles that many young people face in their efforts to engage in decision making processes raises questions about the effectiveness of youth engagement agendas. Arguably, youth engagement cannot be successful if these barriers are overlooked.

2.4 Are young people politically disengaged?

Young people in Britain are often seen as "disengaged" from politics. Their absence from traditional forms of political participation, such as voting and party membership, means they are often seen as a "disengaged" generation (Smith and Thompson, 2015). Young people are seemingly becoming ever more disinterested in and/or disillusioned with traditional politics, as illustrated by low election turnouts and dwindling affiliation with political parties (Sloam, 2007). Research suggests that, when compared to older people, young people have less interest, involvement and knowledge of traditional party politics (Farthing, 2010). Young people are often portrayed, therefore, as politically apathetic. To address this problem, two solutions have been presented: firstly, to attempt to "cure" political apathy through citizenship education; and secondly, by attempting to make politics appear "cool" by selling politicians to a youthful market via celebrity endorsements or appearances at "youth" events, such as music festivals.

Disengagement is seen as a fault with young people rather than with traditional politics and governmental institutions. Mycock and Tonge (2012), for example, point to the lack of political representation for young people, with the average age of MPs and councillors being over fifty. There is also a lack of confidence and trust in politicians, stemming from incidents, such as expenses scandals, broken campaign promises and austerity economics. At the same time, a considerable number of young people face barriers due to a lack of political knowledge. This is not to say that they lack an interest in politics but that there is a lack of accessible, plain-English, information, poor citizenship education in schools, and a lack of attention given to issues that matter to young people (Delli Carpini, 2000; Pentland, 2013).

What is often overlooked, however, is 'the capacity of young people to re/invent their own forms of politics' (Farthing, 2010, 185). Young people are now more likely to engage in issue based forms of politics (Norris, 2003; Farthing, 2010). By moving beyond a concern with voter turnout and party politics, definitions of politics can be widened to include non-conventional political participation, such as identity politics, community activism, demonstrations, boycotts and direct action. By doing so, it becomes easier to identify young people's political participation. It shifts the focus of the "youth disengagement" problem from decreasing party membership and voter turnout, to generational changes and the increasing importance of new political forms. The weakening of traditional politics – i.e. voting – corresponds with an increase in new forms of political participation (Farthing, 2010).

This shift in political participation is aided by new media and technologies which provide opportunities for young people to forge new political communities and create new types of political participation – from "boycott" groups on Facebook, to trending hashtags on Twitter. Issues that mobilise young people are increasingly "big" issues, such as sustainability, equality, and human rights (Farthing, 2010). These new political agendas have two key features: firstly, they increasingly necessitate smaller, more personal actions, such as, boycotting particular brands, recycling, or buying fair trade; and secondly, they are increasingly global issues which transcend national borders.

Local government, and even national government, are often unable to effectively support young people's political agendas. Political activity increasingly takes place on a global stage, led by international non-government organisations, multinational corporations and supranational unions. This is not to suggest that national and local governments have no role to play. Rather, there are now a range of global organisations that can better address the global agenda of youth politics.

Local government should not respond to this by shying away from youth engagement but should instead rethink how local issues can be framed. Councils can still ask questions, such as, 'should we increase bin collections?' or 'should we continue to fund breakfast clubs?' – but they must also provide the space for young people to discuss and apply these issues to the wider global context. The council may ask, therefore, 'are cuts to breakfast clubs acceptable in an era of growing

socioeconomic inequality?' or 'should we increase bin collections when landfill sites are damaging the natural environment?'

2.5 What does this mean for the Council?

Opportunities for young people to contribute to decision making processes are important. Youth engagement activities allow young people to form opinions and proposals particular to their identities, interests and needs. While the proposal of a youth council is laudable, given that will provide some degree of participation for young people, the Council should be mindful of the risk that it may have little influence on decision making. The activities of youth councils are often limited to proposals to educate young people and develop their skills, with engagement restricted to performing consumer-like consultations. Consultation *does* help create more effective policies and services which are *informed* by "users" or "recipients" of those policies and services. Any input from young people will, therefore, provide the Council with valuable information. Yet, youth engagement, focussed on the development of skills, gives the misleading impression that local government are *empowering* young people because they "have a say" in formulating policy when, in fact, their influence is limited.

This is, perhaps, unavoidable. Youth engagement is described as the *involvement* of young people in decision making and, while their contributions are appreciated, it often falls short of giving them any considerable power. Young people are encouraged to *have their say* but these consultations often involve relatively minor issues, such as the cost of public transport or whether a community centre is refurbished. Creating a youth council could, thus, be misleading given that it suggests young people will have an influence over decision making when their influence will be somewhat limited.

How should youth engagement look, therefore? Firstly, it is important that the Council is transparent in its use of the language of participation. If the intention is to give young people a limited voice in decisions made about issues of minor importance, then this must be made clear. In other words, the Council must be honest about the scope of young people's influence. Secondly, the Council needs to acknowledge the various ways in which young people's rights are obstructed and how this creates barriers to engagement.

Embedding youth engagement within the Council's decision-making processes requires the Council to move beyond the assumption that young people do not and cannot act fully as citizens due to their lack of skills, interest or maturity. The Council needs to recognise the role that ageism plays in obstructing young people's participation in decision making processes as "social equals". Young people suffer from imbalances of power based on age, knowledge, experience and access to resources and this makes a significant impact on their ability to engage in democratic processes on an equal footing. This power imbalance needs to be acknowledged and addressed.

If young people enter the Council in its current form, they do so on an extremely unequal footing. The Council is not neutral in terms of age, race and ethnicity, socioeconomic background, gender, gender identity, sexuality, religion and (dis)ability. There is a risk, therefore, that the Council's style of operating results in the exclusion of groups which are less powerful. By acknowledging inequality, in all its forms, the Council can better design a youth engagement strategy that reduces power imbalances between young people and adults.

3. Research Design:

In this section, the methods used to complete the youth engagement review are outlined.

3.1 The ALPA Tool

The ALPA self-assessment tool was designed to look at how the Council can support youth engagement effectively across all services and throughout the full range of its activity. The goal was to demonstrate how services can embed youth engagement in their decision making processes and, by doing do, create a culture that encourages staff, at all levels, to engage with young people. By reflecting on the principles embodied in: *Have Your Say: A plan for local involvement; the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act; the National Standards for Community Engagement; and the Best Value toolkit: Community Engagement*, a series of performance indicators were identified. These are central to embedding youth engagement in the culture of the Council, ranging from communication and organisational attitudes to learning and working with other agencies.

The tool is designed to support refection and dialogue within each service and help them to begin to develop a strategy for youth engagement. The performance indictors have been divided into six categories, each describing an area for consideration: influence, communication, organisational, consistency and co-ordination, reaching everyone, and working with other agencies. You can find a full ALPA tool in Appendix 1.

TABLE 1: PERFORMANCE INDICATORS CATEGORIES

Influence	Ensure that all young people have opportunities to have a valid, valued and meaningful influence over decision making.
Communication	Communicate consistent, clear and accessible information about youth engagement opportunities and outputs.
Organisational	Invest in staff, processes and infrastructure to support and nurture youth engagement within the Council.
Consistency and co-ordination	Co-ordinate the delivery of youth engagement to maximise efficiency, improve quality, foster innovation, share best practice and monitor and learn from involvement and impact.
Reaching everyone	Ensure that all young people, irrespective of identity and background, have opportunities to get involved in youth engagement.
Working with other agencies	Proactively work with external agencies to carry out, and learn from, youth engagement activities.

The indicators allow services to consider, first, the degree of strategic and practical support their service offers for youth engagement and, second, to begin to identify areas for improvement. To help services assess their current support for youth engagement a simple scoring criteria was created which maps indicators against a scale:

TABLE 2: SCORING CRITERIA

Scoring Criteria		Score
Absent	Not doing it, not considered it	0
Limited	No strategic approach, ad hoc activity, limited opportunities/support available	1
Progressing	Developing a strategic approach, implementation patchy but activity in most areas, some opportunities/support available	2
Achieved	Strategic approach adopted and implemented throughout the service. Range of opportunities/support available. Good practice seen throughout all areas and levels of the service.	3

3.1.1 Sample & Response Rate

The self-assessment tool was sent, via email, to thirty-two service managers from across the Council. Unfortunately, it achieved a response rate of just nine percent (three responses). There was not enough data, therefore, to carry out a meaningful analysis and it has not been possible to provide an overview of how services rate their performance.

3.2 #itbeginswithus Survey

An online survey of young people, aged 12-25, was carried out in the Falkirk Council area. The survey was designed to identify *if* and *how* young people want to engage with the Council.

It gathered insights on:

- The issues, if any, that are most important to young people (for example, schools and education, transport, housing, mental health, sport and recreation, etc.);
- The extent to which young people feel they can influence decisions made by the Council;

- The types of engagement activities which young people are most interested in participating in (for example, youth council, online surveys, workshops, etc.).
- Any barriers preventing young people from getting involved in engagement activities.

The survey was hosted on Citizen Space - the Council's online platform used to develop and host surveys. This main advantage of using online surveys is that they can quickly and inexpensively be sent and/or promoted to large numbers of prospective respondents. Moreover, by using Citizen Space, survey data is automatically collated, eliminating the need for manual data entry. Largely, the survey comprised close-ended questions in which respondents choose their answer/s from a list of pre-selected options. A small number of questions were supplemented by optional open-ended questions which were used to gain further insight into the respondents' opinions.   Close-ended questions are designed to create easily quantifiable data and, given that respondents are not required to provide lengthy answers, produce higher response rates.

 It has been proposed that surveys should take no longer than seven to eight minutes to complete. The response rate drops anywhere between 5% and 20% for surveys that take longer than this (Survey Monkey, 2008). In total, the survey took five to ten minutes to complete.

3.2.1 Sample & Response Rate

The survey was aimed at all young people, aged 12-15, living in the Falkirk Council area. There are around 26,409 young people aged 10 – 24 living in Falkirk Council area according to Census data (Falkirk Council, 2013). This figure was used as the approximate size of the target demographic. A statistically significant sample was, thus, calculated as 587, using a confidence level[1] of 95% and margin of error[2] of 4%.

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[1] Confidence Level — How confident do you want to be that the true views of the overall population fall within your margin of error? In other words, how much confidence do you want to have in your findings? If you want 95% confidence, this means that 5 out of 100 responses would lie outside of your margin of error.

[2] Margin of Error — Margin of error, also called confidence interval, tells you how much you can expect your survey results to reflect the views from the overall population. The smaller the margin of error, the more confidence you may have in your results. The bigger the margin of error, the farther they can stray from the views of the total population. For example, a 60% "yes" response with a margin of error of 4% means that between 56% and 64% of the general population think that the answer is "yes."

The survey received 627 responses. The sample is, thus, statistically significant and the findings of the survey can be generalised to the wider population of 12-25 year olds living in the Falkirk Council area.

As Figure 1 shows, 54% of the respondents are under the age of sixteen; 25% are aged between sixteen and nineteen; and 21% are aged between twenty and twenty-five.

FIGURE 1: SURVEY RESONDENTS SORTED BY AGE
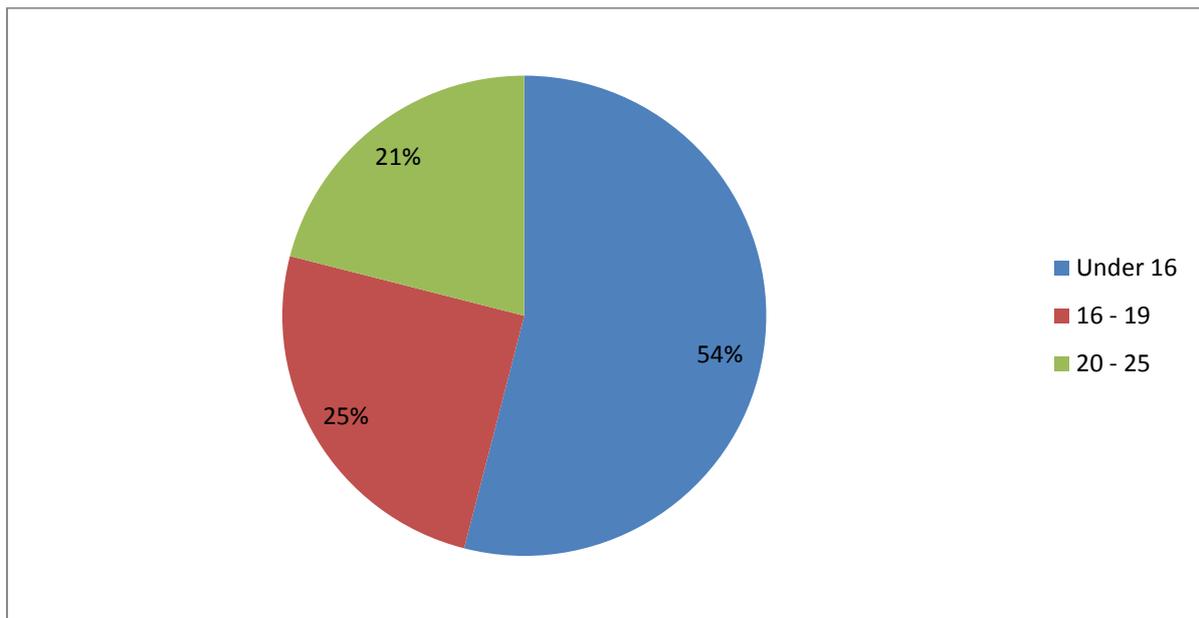
3.2.2   Survey Promotion

The Council's Communications team assisted with the promotion of the consultation using the various channels noted below. Participation was incentivised with a prize draw of four, fifty pound, Amazon vouchers.

Gatekeepers:

An email, outlining the survey, was sent to both internal and external gatekeepers. They were encouraged to promote the survey to local young people using their marketing and social media channels. Community organisations working with young people with protected characteristics were targeted specifically, so as to engage with as wide a range of young people as possible.

Internal gatekeepers included: Children's Services (including schools and CLD); Education & Training Unit; Leaving Care Service; Falkirk Champions Board; Gypsy & Traveller site manager; and Criminal Justice.

External gatekeepers included: Forth Valley College; Year of Young People ambassadors; Falkirk District Scouts; Girlguiding Scotland; Action on Hearing Loss; Al Masaar; Apex; Army Cadet Force; Falkirk and Clackmannanshire Carers Centre; Forth Valley Migrant Support Network; LGBT Youth Scotland; Rainbow Muslim Women's Group; and Epilepsy Connections.

Social Media:

Pupils from Larbert High starred in a short video[3] which was created to promote the survey on social media. Targeted advertising was used on Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook to great effect. This is particularly noteworthy given that some of these platforms are new to the Council. A series of tweets, encouraging residents to complete the online survey, were also used.

Posters:

Posters promoting the survey were produced, using images of pupils from Larbert High, and distributed by: Falkirk Community Trust; Children's Services (in schools and by CLD); Howgate Shopping Centre; and Forth Valley College.

News Release:

A news release on the consultation was issued in conjunction the launch of the survey. This resulted in coverage on the Falkirk Herald Facebook page.

4. Survey Results

In this section, the survey results are presented and discussed. While the overall results can be considered representative of the wider population of 12-25 year olds living in the Falkirk Council area, they have also been broken down, to a less representative level, as an indication of how different age groups consider youth engagement. These age groups are: under 16, 16-19 and 20-25. These age groups

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[3] https://youtu.be/1DR0cfNoaGo

have been chosen as they represent three distinct stages: formal education (under 16); further education and/or period of post-formal education adolescence (16-19); and early adulthood (20-25).

4.1 Services

The respondents were asked which services they would like to know more about and help to influence. The results suggest that young people have a particular interest in influencing Schools and Education (59%). This is unsurprising, given that the vast majority of under-sixteens attend school. This trend continues beyond formal education, with 55% of Falkirk school leavers participating in further or higher education (Scottish Government, 2018). Relatedly, the results indicate that many young people are interested in influencing Jobs, Careers and Training (53%). Again, this was anticipated given that 34% of Falkirk school leavers are in employment or training (Scottish Government, 2018) and 24% of 18-24 year olds in the Falkirk Council area are unemployed (Falkirk Council, 2017).

Mental Health is also among the services of most interest to young people (53%). Mental wellbeing was earmarked as a particular area of concern in the Children's Services Wellbeing Surveys, particularly among secondary school aged girls (ScotCen, 2017). Sport, Leisure and Culture was also among the services young people would most like to help to influence (49%). Again, this is expected given that research indicates that 16-24 year olds in the UK have, on average, six hours of leisure time a day (Office for National Statistics, 2015).

Services of the least interest to young people are Fostering and Adoption (19%) and Carers and Disability Support (20%). This level of interest is arguably higher than expected. In 2016, just 7% of children and young people living in Scotland, under the age of 16, had a limiting long term physical or mental health condition (Scottish Government, 2016); just 5% if people living in Falkirk provide 1-19 hours of unpaid care (Falkirk Council, 2016); and just 2% of children living in Scotland in 2016 were looked after by local authorities or were on the child protection register (Who Cares? Scotland, 2017). This suggests that interest in these services may extend beyond those young people who are directly affected. The Council should exercise caution,

therefore, in dismissing the need for youth engagement within these services and should continue to support and resource initiatives such as the Champions Board.

Other services of least interest to young people include Bins, Rubbish and Recycling (21%) and Community Safety (24%).

FIGURE 2: WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING SERVICES WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT AND HELP TO INFLUENCE?
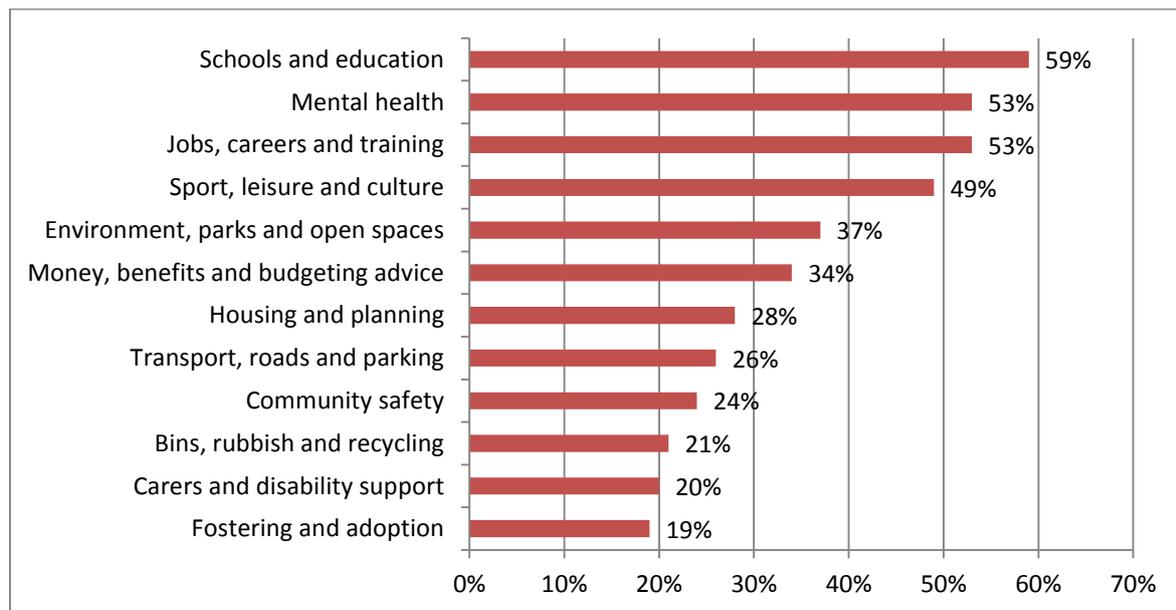
When responses are analysed at an age group level, several differences become noticeable (see Figure 3). Schools and Education remains the top service for the under 16 (58%) and 16-19 (68%) age groups. It drops out of the top four services, however, for the 20-25 age group (50%). This is, perhaps, unsurprising given that there is no requirement on this age group to participate in formal education. The figure (50%), however, remains somewhat high. This may be explained by participation in higher education. 36% of Falkirk school leavers in 2016/17 went on to higher education (Scottish Government, 2018). What is more, it is likely that many young people in the 20-25 age group are parents and will, thus, have an interest in the education and schooling of their children. The service of most interest to the 20-25 year old category is Jobs, Careers and Training, indicating that these young people are more focussed on post-education opportunities.

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FIGURE 3: SERVICES RESPONDENTS WOULD LIKE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT AND HELP TO INFLUENCE, SORTED BY AGE
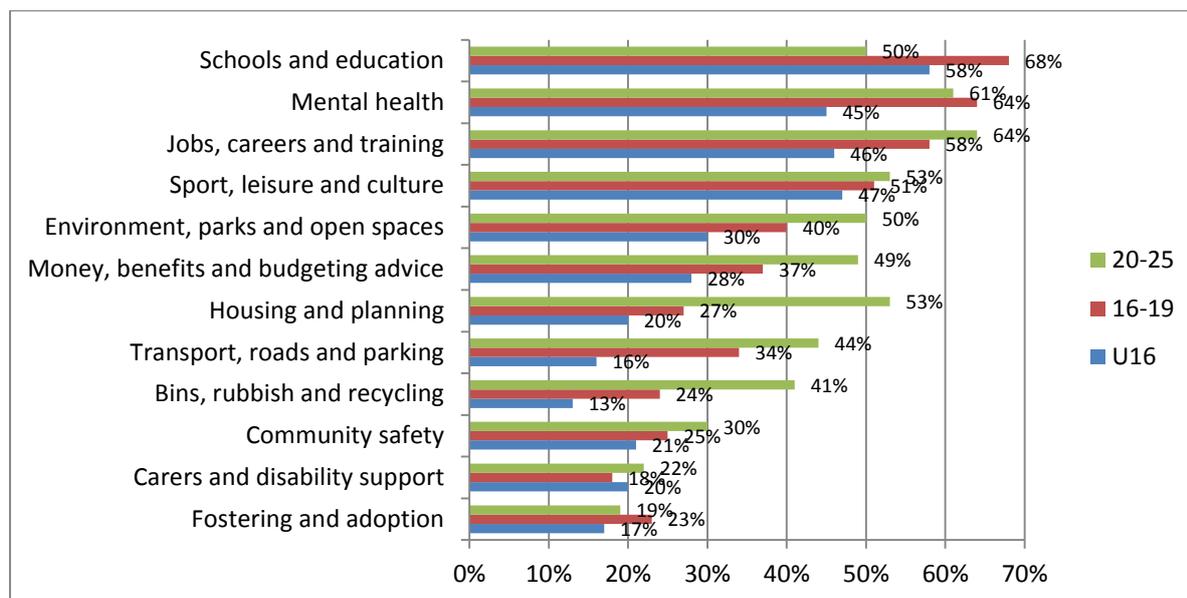

Mental Health is of more interest to the 16-19 (64%) and 20-25 (61%) age groups than it is to the under 16 age group (46%). The Scottish Health Survey found that young people, aged 16-24, scored the lowest levels of wellbeing in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2016b), which may explain their particular interest in mental health services.

Housing and Planning is among the top services for the 20-25 age group (53%), compared to just 27% for the 16-19 age group, and 20% for the under 16 age group. Arguably, this age group are more likely to have left home or be considering leaving home. Research conducted by the Office of National Statistics (2017), for example, shows that 52% of 21 year olds, living in the UK, live with their parents, compared to 69% 19 year olds and 93% 16 year olds. This may also explain the higher levels of interest in Bins, Rubbish and Recycling amongst the 20-25 year old age group (41%), compared to the under 16 (13%) and 16-19 (24%) categories, given that they are more likely to be householders.
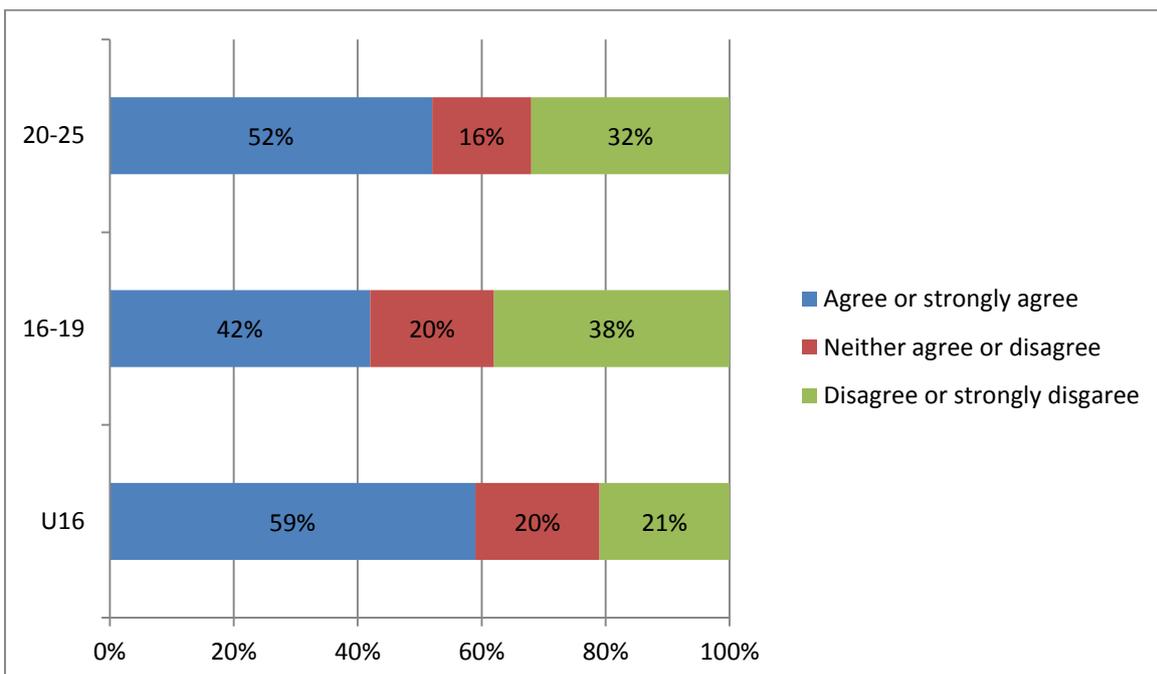
4.2 Influence

53% on young people agree or strongly agree that they can influence decisions affecting their local area. This finding is encouraging as it suggests that over half of young people living in Falkirk feel they are able to participate in decision making processes.

FIGURE 4: YOUNG PEOPLE CAN INFLUENCE DECISIONS AFFECTING THEIR LOCAL AREA
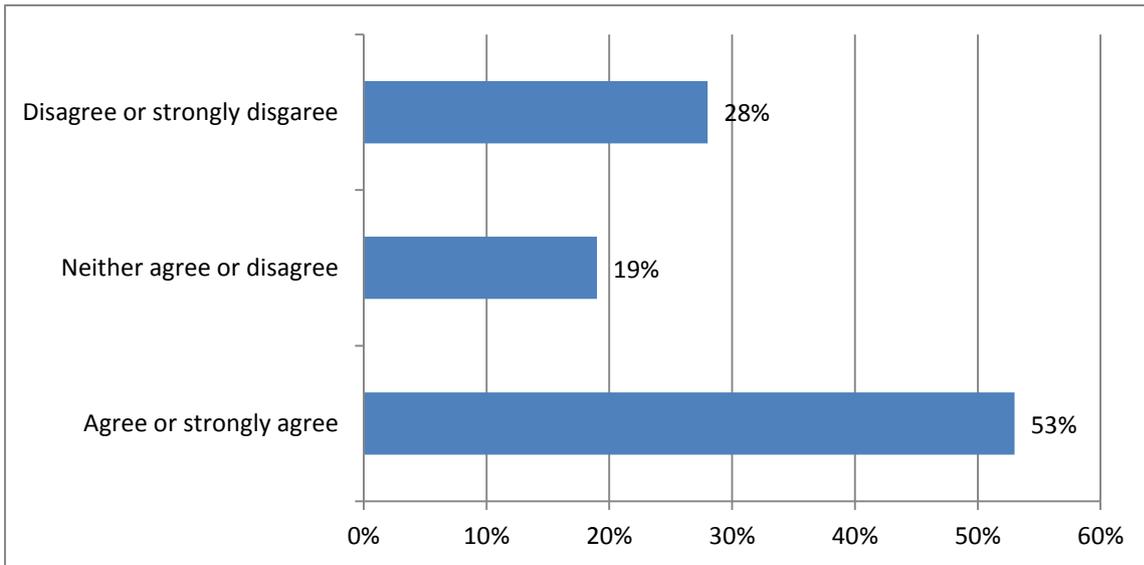

This finding is largely replicated when results are analysed by age group. In the 16-19 age group, however, only 42% agree of strongly agree that they can influence decisions affecting their local area. It is impossible to determine why this might be without further research. It can, perhaps, be attributed to frustration with the democratic process. This frustration may stem from the highly contentious voting age debate, or disappointment with election and referendum results deemed "skewed" by older generations. Alternatively, it may be due to a decline in youth engagement opportunities for those young people no longer in school and/or further education.

FIGURE 5: YOUNG PEOPLE CAN AFFECT DECISIONS AFFECTING THEIR LOCAL AREA, SORTED BY AGE

In the specific context of Council led youth engagement activities, just 37% of young people agree or strongly agree that their participation would have an influence over decisions made by the Council – a finding that is consistent across age groups. Again, one can only speculate as to why this may be. It is possible that young people have more confidence in the traditional democratic process of voting that they do in Council led youth engagement initiatives. They may have had a negative experience of Council youth engagement activities or may lack trust in the Council in general.

FIGURE 6: MY VIEWS WOULD INFLUENCE DECISIONS MADE BY THE COUNCIL
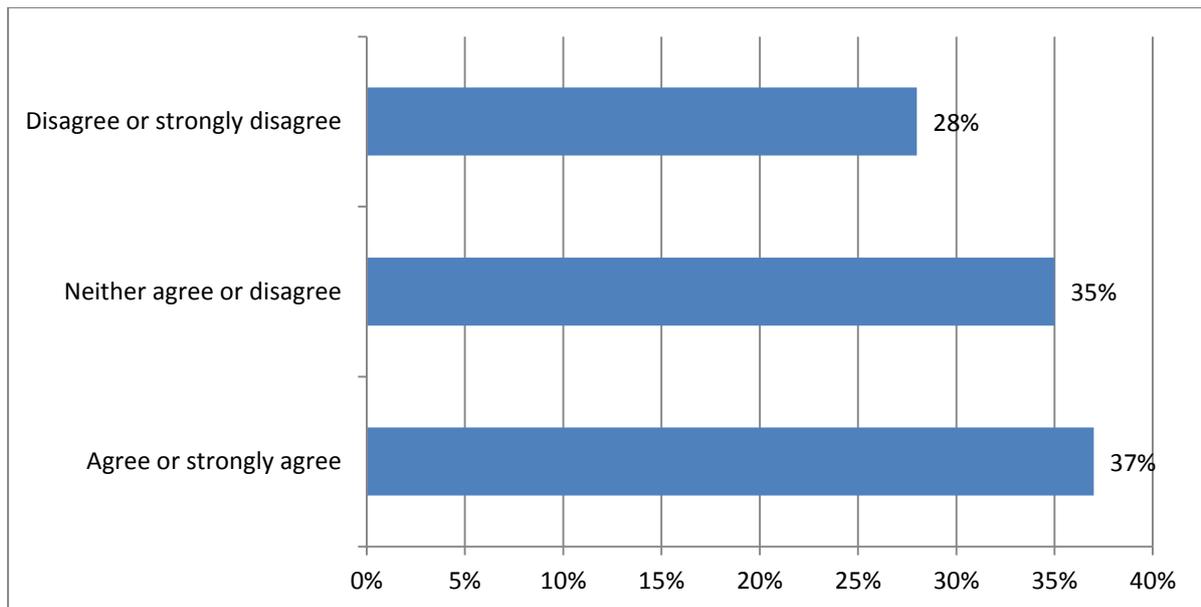
It may also be explained by figure 14, which shows that only 42% of young people believe their opinions and views would be valued by the Council.

**FIGURE 14: MY OPNIONS AND VIEWS WOULD BE VALUED**
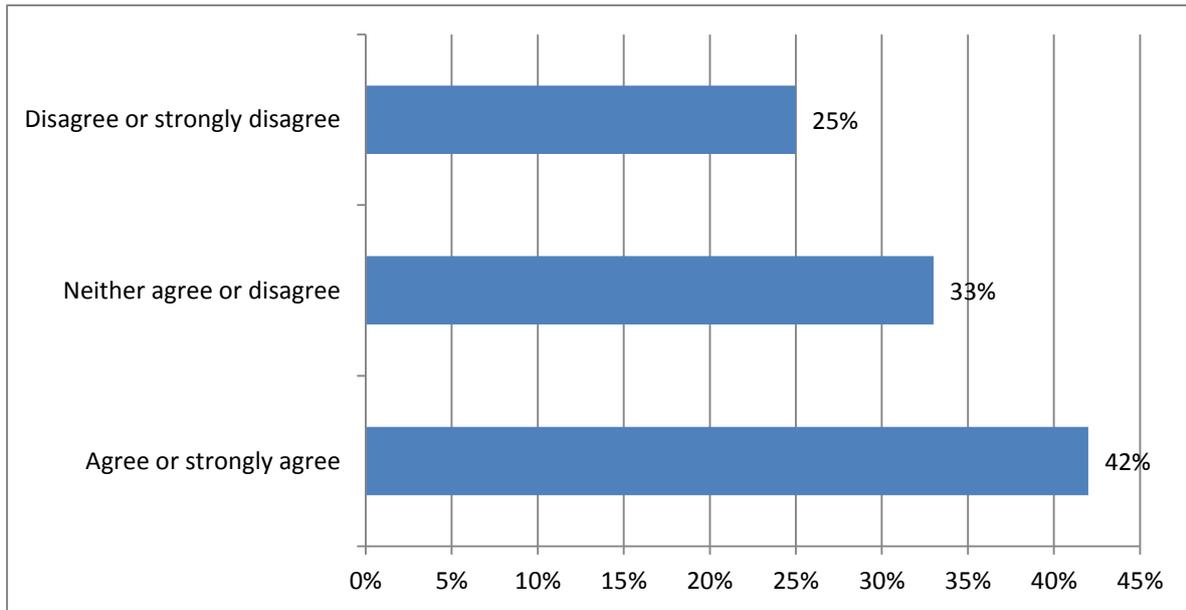
4.3 Involvement

82% of young people agree or strongly agree that they would like to be involved in making decisions that affect them and their local area. This increases with age: 88% of 20-25 year olds and 86% of 16-19 year olds want to be involved in decision making processes, compared to 77% of under 16s. This is not unexpected given that political and civic engagement generally increases with age (O'Neill, 2007).

FIGURE 7: I WOULD LIKE TO BE INVOLVED IN MAKING DECISIONS THAT AFFECT ME AND MY LOCAL AREA
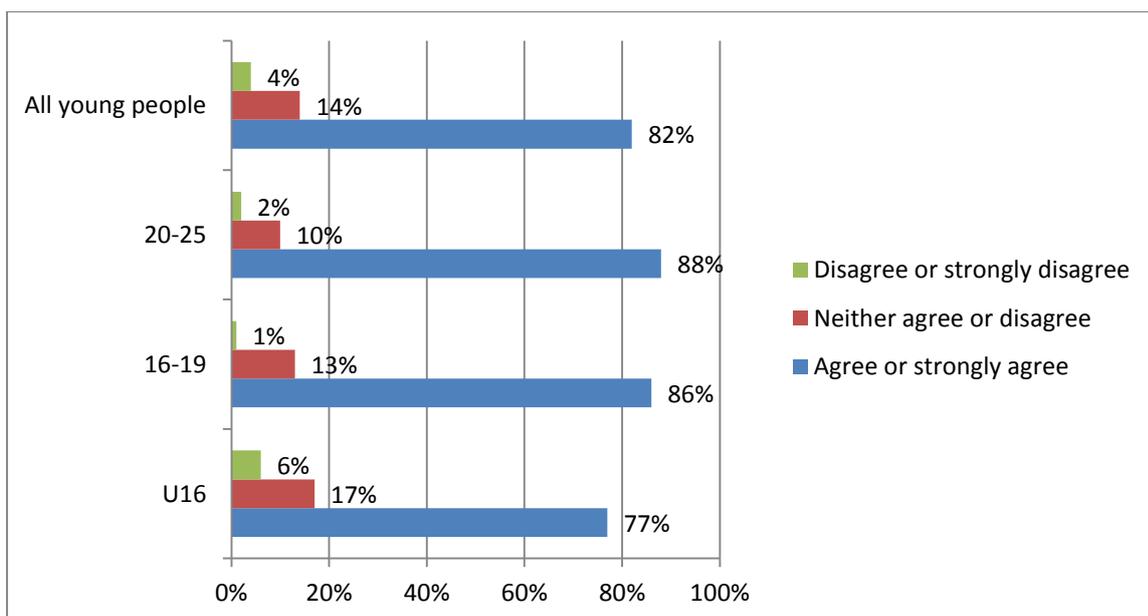
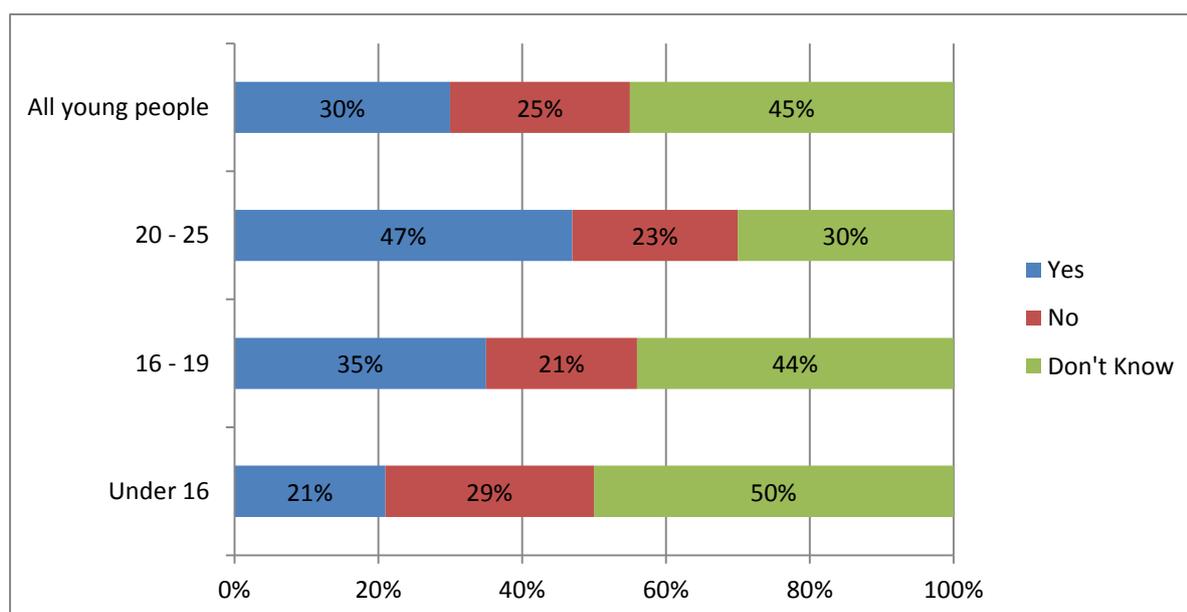Only 15% of respondents had been involved in Council youth engagement activities prior to completing the survey.
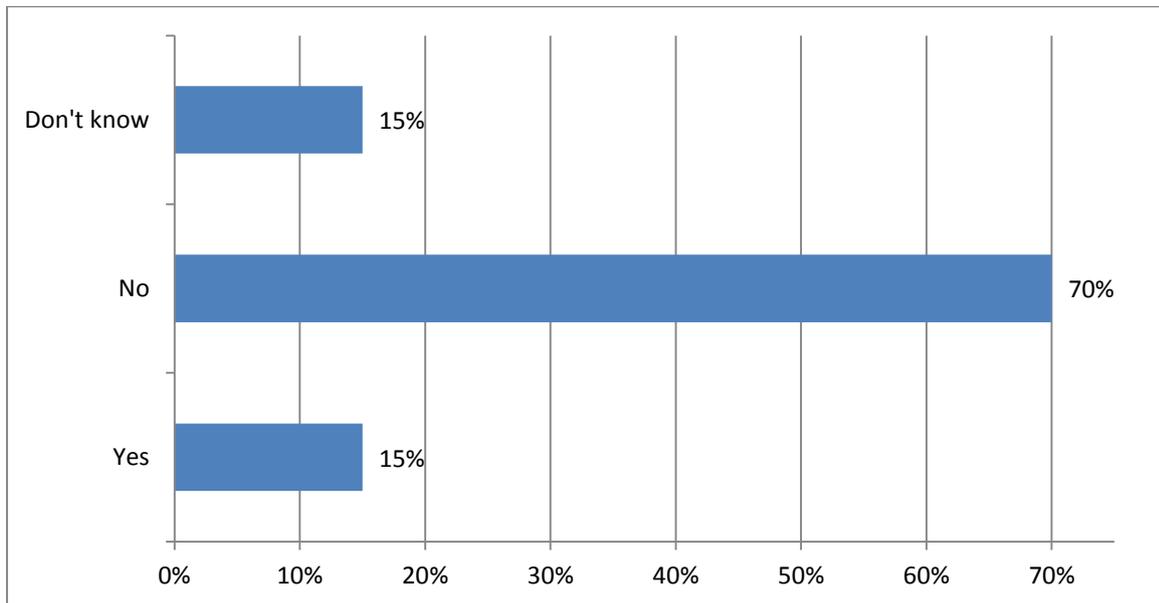
4.3.1 Citizens panel

Survey respondents were asked if they were interested in joining the Council's existing community engagement initiative – the Citizens Panel. The Citizens Panel helps the Council listen and respond to the public's views. The Panel is made up of more than 1000 local people who have volunteered to respond to a range of online surveys throughout the year. The surveys provide feedback on Council services, as well as information about the needs of local communities and other issues. This information can help the Council improve its services and make sure it is meeting the needs of local communities. The panel is largely made up of older adults.

30% of young people showed interest in joining the Citizen Panel, resulting in 167 sign ups (27% of respondents). Young people in the 20-25 age group showed the most interest, with 45% interested in joining the Citizens Panel. This was followed by 35% of 16-19 year olds and just 21% of under 16s.

Largely, young people were interested in joining the Citizens Panel as they are eager to have their say and contribute to making positive changes in their area. One respondent said. 'As someone who was born and raised in Falkirk, I'm passionate about improving our Council area…' while another said 'I would like to have my voice heard and help my local community'. Others were passionate about furthering the voices of young people, with one respondent saying 'I believe the future of our area belongs to the young people'. Reasons given by young people disinterested in joining the Citizens Panel included lack of time, lack of motivation and uncertainty as to what it would entail. Many respondents felt their participation would make little difference to decision making processes, with one saying 'I feel like being a part of these don't really make a difference to what really happens'. Others felt the Citizens Panel was aimed towards older generations.

4.3.2 Youth council

Survey respondents were asked if they would be interested in joining a Falkirk Youth Council. Just 28% of young people showed interest in joining. This figure rises to 30% for the 16-19 age group and 29% for the under 16 age group. It decreases to 24% for the 20-25 age group which is expected given they are likely to have less leisure time and more likely to be engaged in the existing democratic process. Indeed, many respondents believed that a youth council is more appropriate for younger age groups. One respondent said, 'It seems more appropriate for school

aged. I'm a parent of two and I'd feel very out of place and old', while another said, 'It is aimed at children and not adults with a vote'.

FIGURE 10: A YOUTH COUNCIL IS SOMETHING I'D LIKE TO BE PART OF
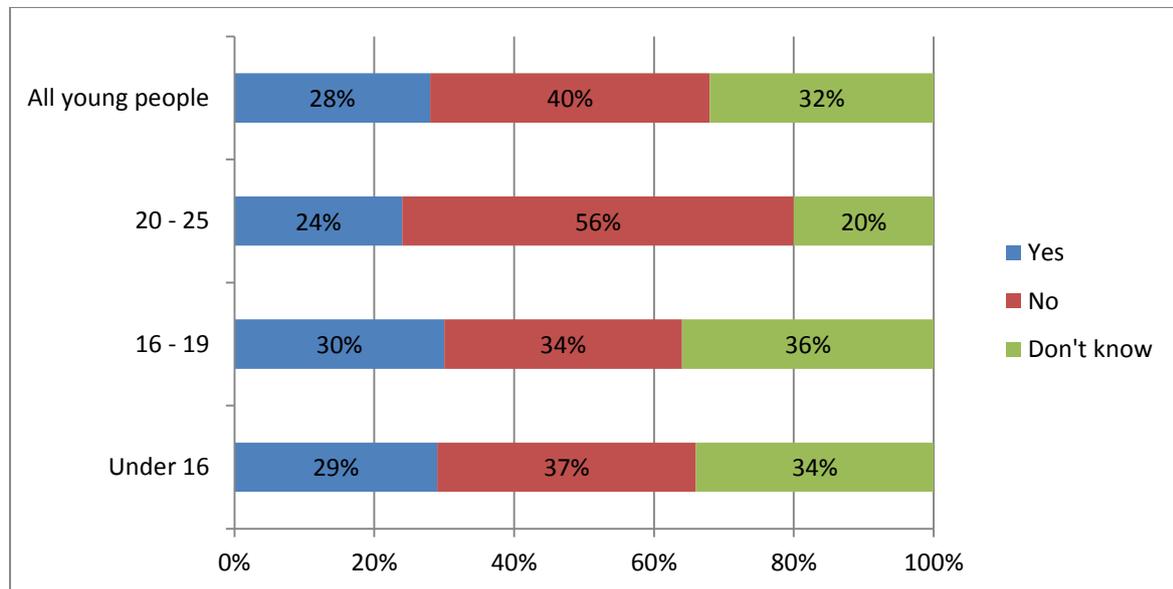
A range of reasons were given as to why the respondents do not wish to join a Youth Council. Largely, respondents consider themselves too busy to attend and felt that other methods of engagement, such as online surveys, are more convenient. Many others felt it would be a wasted effort, with one respondent saying 'I find it unnecessary and just another useless committee that can't do anything'. Many concerns were raised about bullying. One respondent said, 'I'm not comfortable being in a group as I feel intimidated', while another said 'Sometimes people with strong convictions will bully people who disagree with them and I wouldn't feel like I could give my true opinions in that environment'. For some respondents it was important, therefore, that a Youth Council should be representative of a wide range of backgrounds, experiences and identities. One respondent explained, 'Not every young person has the same experience and it would only be an effective panel if a range of youth could express their opinions to allow equal changes'.

Young people interested in joining a youth council felt it would be a good opportunity to meet other young people and for young people to have a say in Council decision making. One respondent said, 'I like the thought that the younger generation can be heard as they are the ones who have their life ahead of them so it can benefit them',

while another said 'It's a good way to get young people interested in their local community'.

4.3.3 Preferred way of getting involved

Respondents were asked their preferred way of getting involved in Council decision making processes. Online surveys emerge as a frontrunner, with 70% of respondents choosing them as their preferred method of engagement. They are followed by social media (49%) and events at school and college (40%). As discussed on page 9, new media and technologies are transforming young people's political participation and this is reflected in the respondents' clear preference for online methods of engagement. Traditional methods of youth engagement, such as youth groups (16%) and public events (31%), were among the least preferred methods.

FIGURE 11: HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE INVOLVED IN MAKING DECISIONS THAT AFFECT YOU AND YOUR LOCAL AREA?
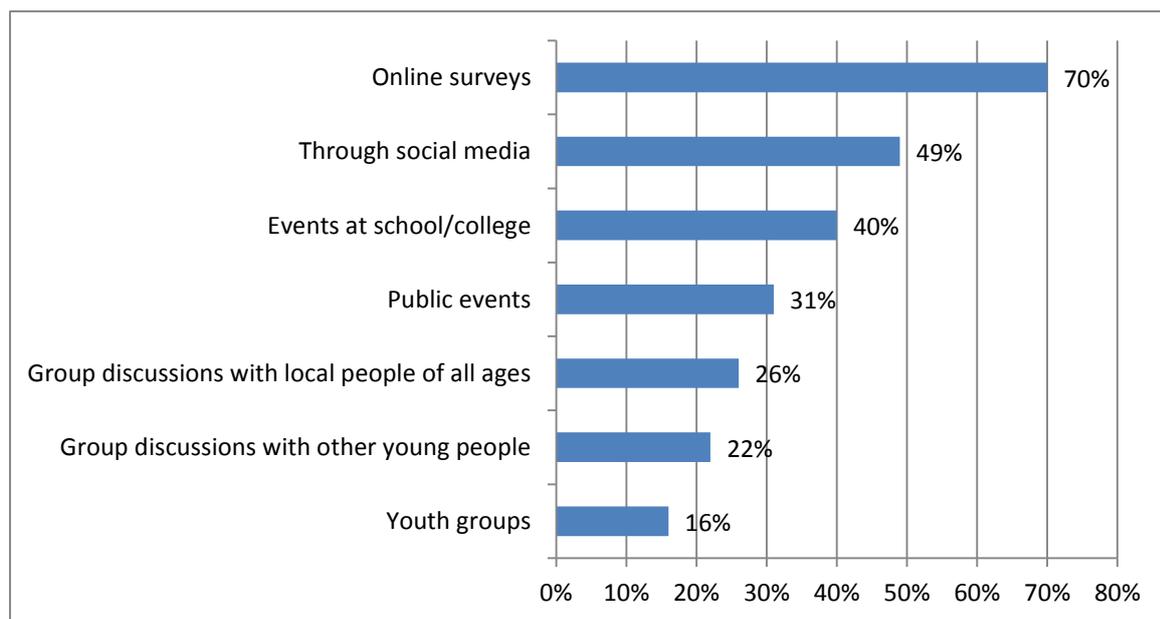
The preferred methods of engagement remain largely consistent across ages, with online surveys remaining the top preference for all age groups. Though social media is among the top three preferences for all age groups, it is considerably more popular with the 20-25 age group (71%) than it is with the 16-19 age group (58%) and under 16 age group (37%). It is likely that this older cohort of young people have better access to social media. Younger age groups may have limited access to social media due to parental restrictions or lack of access to technology, such as

smart phones and laptops. Unsurprisingly, 'events at school or college' drops out the top three preferences for the 20-25 age group. Youth groups and group discussions remain consistently at the bottom for all three age groups.

FIGURE 12: HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE INVOLVED IN MAKING DECISIONS, SORTED BY AGE?
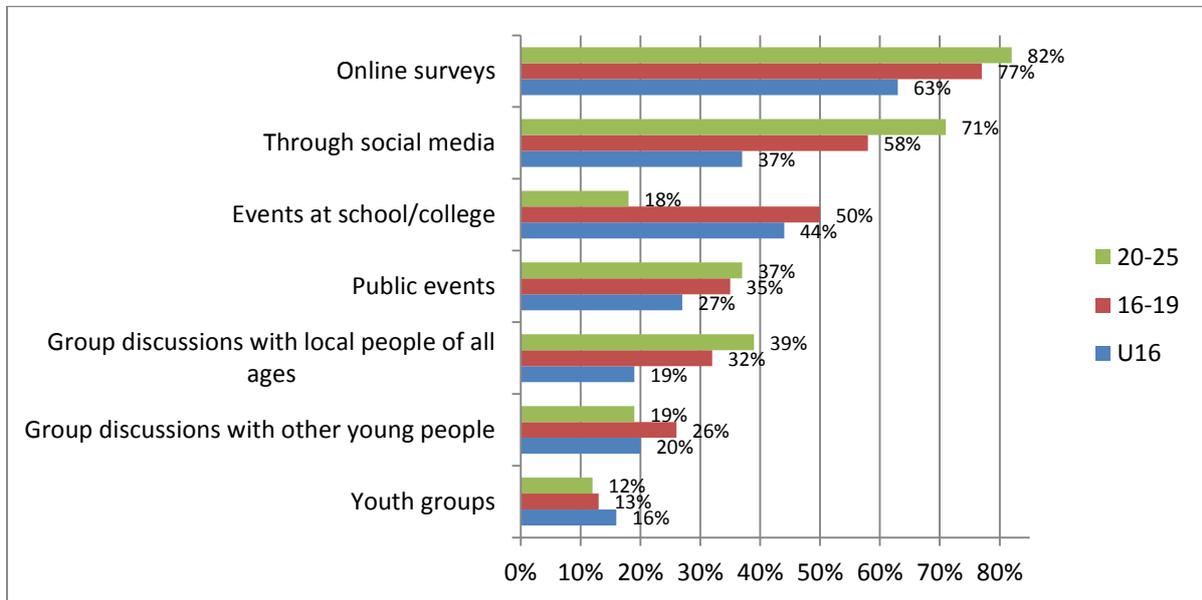
4.3.4 Getting involved

Only 29% of young people know how to get involved in youth engagement activities at Falkirk Council, despite 82% of young people expressing a wish to be involved in decision making processes. This rises slightly for the under 16 age group, with 35% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they know how to get involved. This is likely due to the Council concentrating youth engagement efforts in schools.

**FIGURE 13: I KNOW HOW TO GET INVOLVED WITH YOUTH ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES AT FALKIRK COUNCIL.**
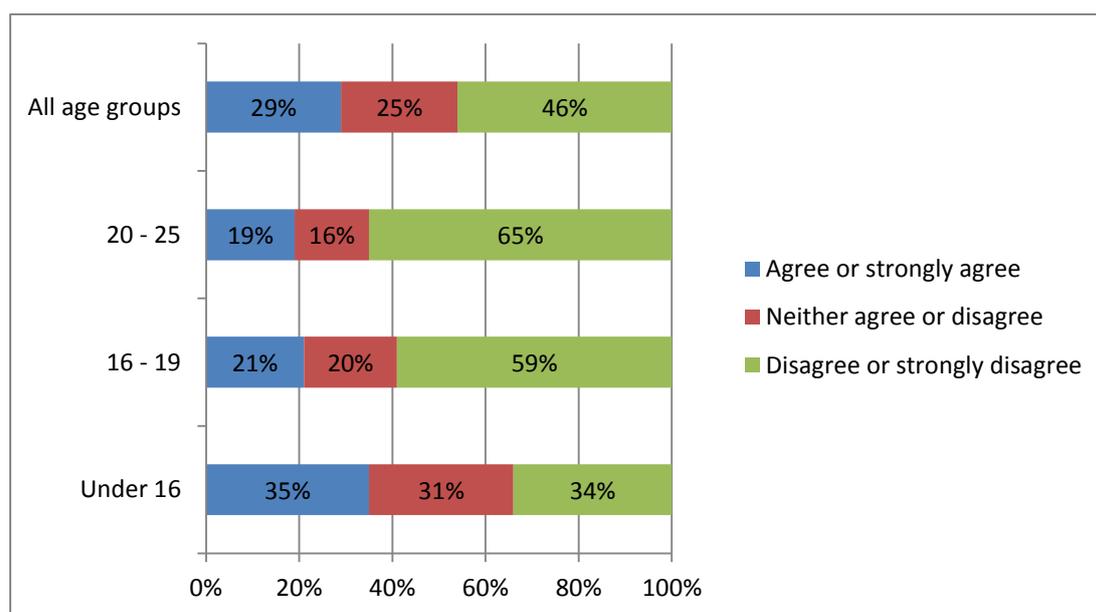
4.3.5 Barriers to involvement

A lack of knowledge of how to get involved in youth engagement was rated the biggest barrier to involvement (56%). The Council should consider, therefore, how it can better promote youth engagement activities. Other barriers include: not feeling confident enough to get involved (56%); not having enough spare time to get involved (44%); and not feeling knowledgeable enough to get involved (36%). This is largely consistent across age groups. It is worth noting, however, that the 20-25 age group had a larger number of respondents (15%) citing caring responsibilities, for children and other family members, as a barrier to engagement.

FIGURE 14: WHICH BARRIERS, IF ANY, PREVENT YOU FROM GETTING INVOLVED IN YOUTH ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES?
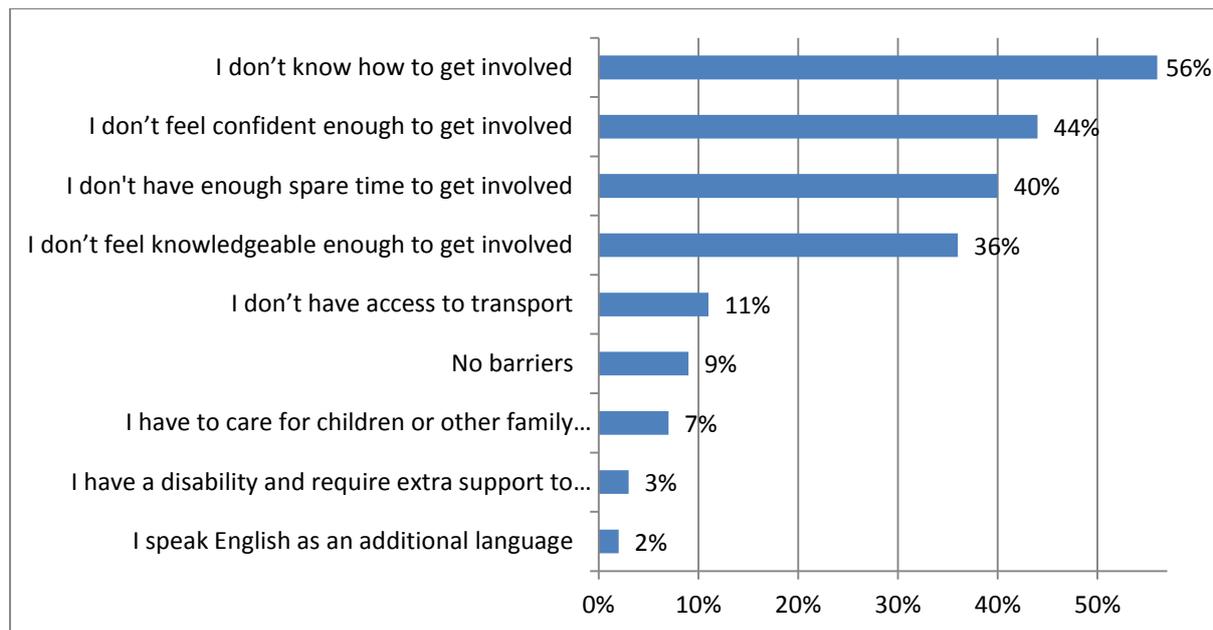
A lack of confidence and knowledge can be tackled using community capacity building. This entails, 'activities, resources and support that strengthen the skills, abilities and confidence of people and community groups to take effective action and leading roles in the development of communities' (Skinner, 2006, 4). This may be easier to achieve within schools and colleges and consideration should, thus, be given to how this can be achieved for the 16-19 and 20-25 age groups.

FIGURE 15: BARRIERS PREVENTING INVOLVEMENT IN YOUTH ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES, SORTED BY AGE
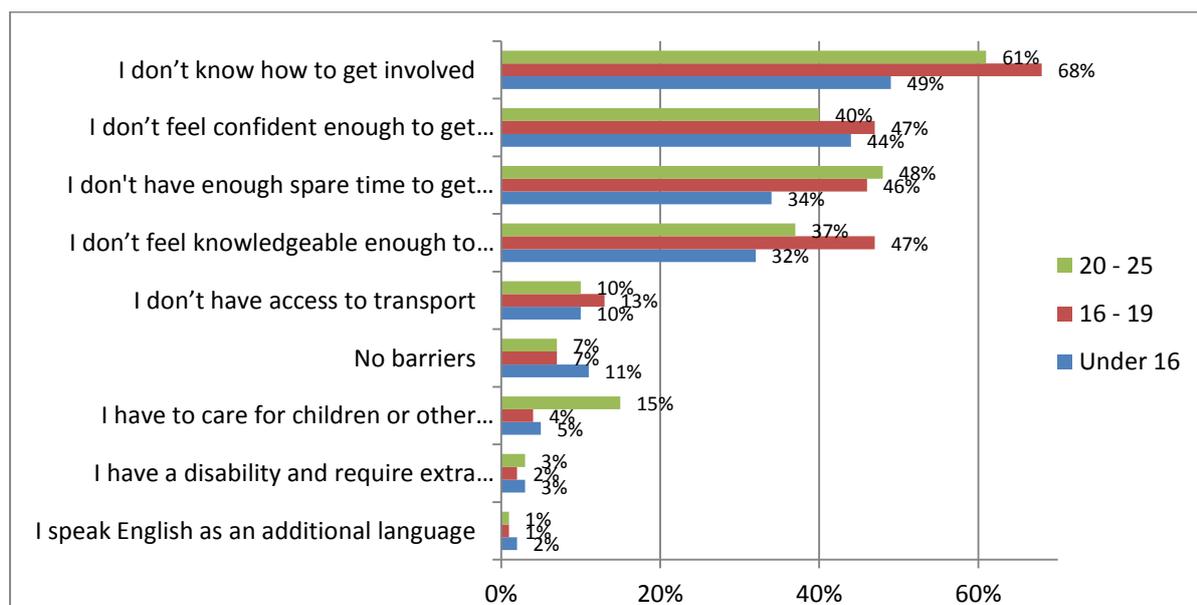
Respondents cited a range of other barriers, outwith those listed in the survey. Many respondents simply view youth engagement as a wasted effort and do not believe it would make a difference to decision making. One respondent said, 'I feel like the youth voice would be discarded by people that are older', while another said, 'I can't be bothered wasting my time with youth engagement programmes that make no real difference'. Bullying was also cited as a barrier to getting involved. One respondent said, 'I am scared I would be bullied because I'm a Tory' while another said, 'not a lot of young people these days are very nice and probably wouldn't support me/you/others wanting to get involved'. Other respondents cited barriers including: living away from Falkirk during term time; feeling "too old" for youth engagement activities; and simply having no interest in being involved.

4.4 Receiving information

Respondents were asked through which channels they would like to learn about changes and developments in the Falkirk Council area and in their local community. The most popular channels were: at school or college (45%); Facebook (44%); email (44%); and Twitter (41%). This suggests a preference for online methods, with traditional methods, such as post and public events, chosen by just 26% and 19% of respondents respectively.

FIGURE 16: HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO LEARN ABOUT CHANGES AND DEVELOPMENTS IN THE FALKIRK COUNCIL AREA AND YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY?
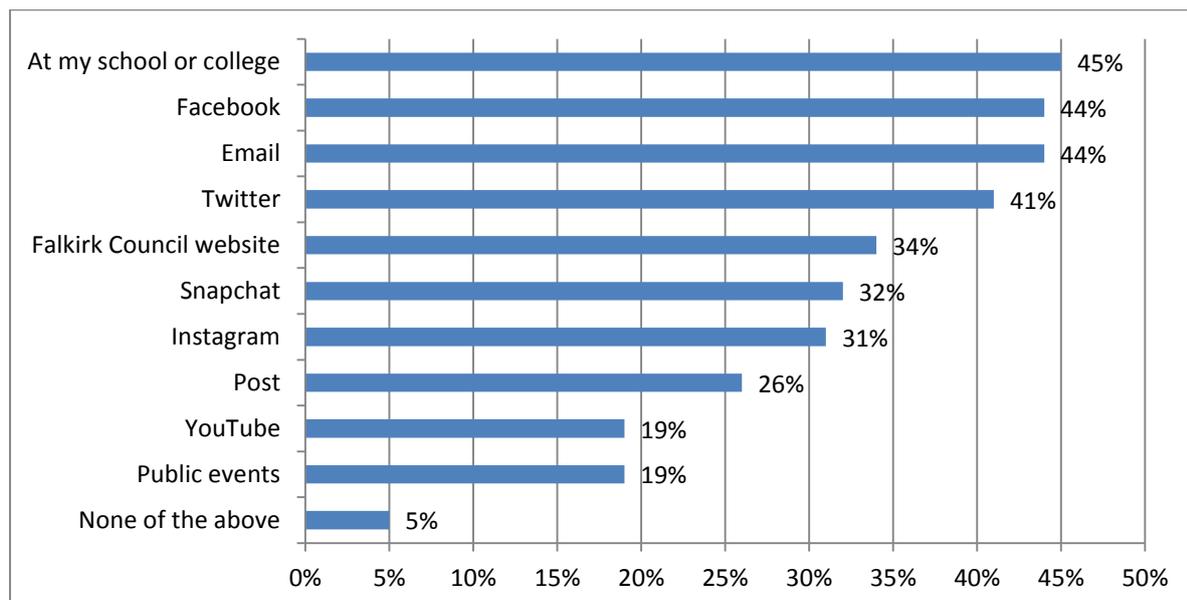
Preferences vary across age groups. Receiving information at school or college is the most popular option for the under 16 (55%) and 16-19 (53%) age groups. This channel is among the least preferred for the 20-25 group (9%) which is unsurprising given this group are less likely to be in school or college. All age groups show a clear preference for online methods, however, preferred online channels vary. As can be seen in Figure 17, Facebook and Twitter are popular among the 16-19 and 20-25 age groups, while Snapchat and Instagram are most popular among the under 16 category. A preference for public events and post remain consistently low across age groups, again suggesting that online methods are preferred.

FIGURE 17: HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO LEARN ABOUT CHANGES AND DEVELOPMENTS, SORTED BY AGE?
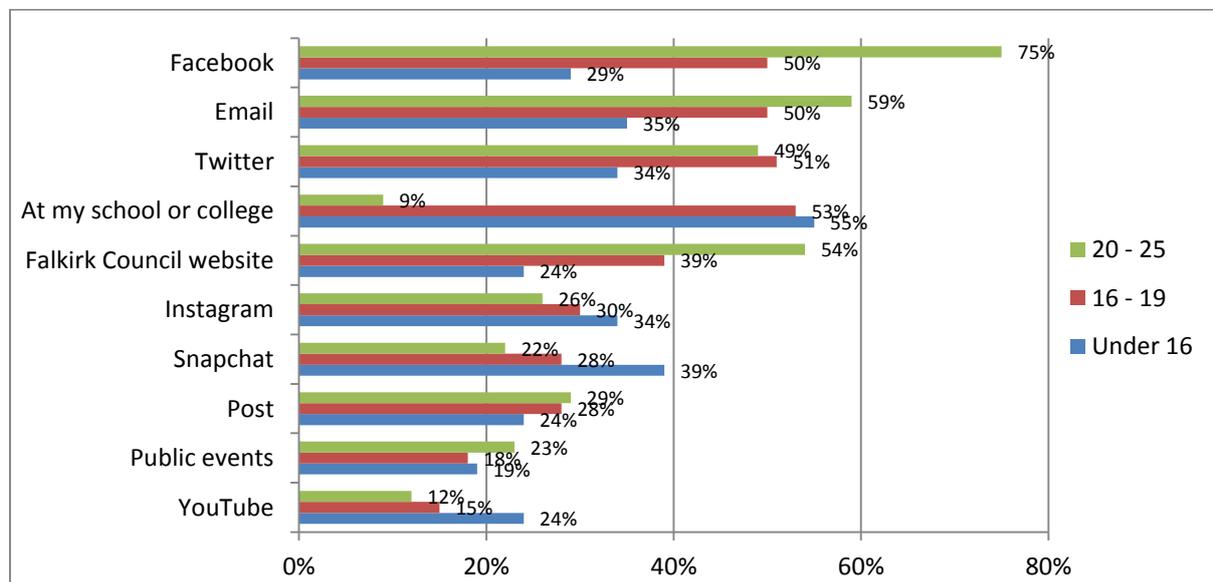
4. Conclusion and recommendations

It is difficult to say, with any precision, how effectively the Council is engaging with young people. A Council wide self-assessment would have provided a useful picture of how well the Council is meeting the principles set out in its participation strategy. The survey results, on the other hand, provide a picture of how well young people think the Council is performing. Over half of young people feel they can have an influence over decisions made about their local area. Arguably, this suggests that the Council is performing well. Just over a third of young people, however, believe that Council youth engagement activities would have any influence over Council decision making. On several occasions, the young people who responded to this survey said that youth engagement would be a "waste of time" and "would make no difference".

Less than half felt their views would be valued by the Council. This indicates there is a great sense of distrust felt towards the Council. This must be mended.

Less than a third of young people know how to get involved in Council youth engagement activities, yet over three quarters of young people said they want to be involved. This remains the biggest barrier to involvement. The Council needs to improve its promotion of youth engagement activities and, more importantly, provide more opportunities for young people to participate. These opportunities must be rooted in evidence. Youth engagement activities should be based not on what the Council *thinks* young people want, but on what young people have told us.

We know that a lack of representativeness, within youth engagement activities, can disempower young people from minority groups. And we know that young people experience an imbalance of power in the Council's decision making processes. Young people seldom have the knowledge, experience and resources to participate in the democratic process on an equal footing. The young people who responded to this survey said they lack the knowledge and confidence to get involved in youth engagement. Work must be done to increase young people's understanding of local government and the issues in their local communities.

This doesn't always necessitate large scale citizenship education programmes. Knowledge can be improved simply by getting better at giving young people the information they need to form opinions and make decisions on local issues. Young people have asked us to provide this information, predominantly, through social media and email and at school and college. It is important that the Council look at how it can better use web and social media platforms to engage with young people. This work is currently ongoing within the Communications and Participation Unit. There are plans to expand the Council's use of social media as an information and customer contact tool.

This alone will not increase participation rates. Some young people simply may not want to be involved. Those who do may not be interested in all Council matters. This does not mean that young people are disengaged or apathetic. Rather, it means that the Council must be mindful of young people's interests when designing youth engagement activities. The young people who responded to this survey told us that they want to influence: schools and education; mental health; and jobs, careers and

training. They are less interested in influencing bins, rubbish and recycling and community safety. Of course, interests change over time. As young people grow older, new interests emerge, such as housing and planning. We also know that young people are increasingly interested in global issues and we need to find a way to make "the local" global. The Council can better engage young people by consulting them on the issues they have told us are important.

New media and technologies are transforming political participation. For this reason, the Council must carefully consider the methods through which it delivers youth engagement. Evidently, establishing a youth council is not the solution. Just 28% of young people were interested in joining a youth council and under a fifth showed interest in joining other youth groups. This suggests that traditional, "face-to-face", methods of engagement are no longer popular. What *is* clear is that online surveys are the most favoured method of engagement, with almost three quarters of young people rating this as their preferred method. Half of young people are also eager to engage with the Council on social media. The Council must think carefully how such an approach will be packaged. Under a third of young people found the Council's existing online survey channel –the Citizens Panel – appealing. Such an approach would, thus, require careful design.

This is not to argue that the Council completely disregard other methods of engagement. The responses of young people, under the age of 19, showed a demand for school and college based activities. The Council should pursue this. This does not mean simply asking schools and colleges to distribute survey after survey. In the experience of the Communications and Participation Unit, schools are often overburdened with surveys from local government, central government and other public services. The Council needs to work with its schools to develop an effective way to deliver effective citizenship education and more opportunities for constructive engagement that will make a real and measurable difference to Council decision making.

Beyond all, it is important that Council are realistic. Young people's influence will always be limited and that is ok, as long as it is acknowledged. Without doubt, we need to move beyond box-ticking, performance indicators and tokenistic attempts to include young people. We need to value and act upon the contributions of young

people and ensure this is fed back in terms of outputs. Yet, the Council must also be transparent and manage the expectations of young people. We cannot promise young people immediate change but we can promise that we will listen. The Council are constrained by budgets, resources and statutory duties. It will not always be possible to act on the contributions of young people. This, perhaps, makes us feel uncomfortable in an era of "co-production" and "service user involvement" which tells us that advisory surveys are simply not good enough. But we must act on evidence. The Council can still effectively engage with young people while being clear about the scope of their influence.

4.1   Recommendations

Based on the evidence gathered in this report, it is recommended that the Council:

- Develop an online survey platform, similar to the Citizens Panel. Further consultation with young people is needed to determine how this can be designed and rolled out effectively;

- Promote youth engagement activities more effectively using the online channels which are preferred by young people. The Council should better familiarise itself with social media platforms, such as Facebook and Snapchat, and identify how they can better used;

- Work closely with schools and Forth Valley College to provide young people opportunities to get involved in youth engagement;

- Use social media to keep young people informed of changes and developments in their local areas;

- Increase young people's knowledge of local democracy and the issues affecting their communities so that they can more confidentially get involved in youth engagement activities;

- Regularly ask young people what issues are important to them and design engagement activities around this. This may be achieved through an annual survey through which an engagement agenda is developed;

- Manage the expectations of young people by being honest about the scope of their influence over decision making processes.

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4. Appendix 1: ALPA Tool

	Indicators	Absent	Limited	Progressing	Achieved
Influence	Young people are involved in the identification, evidencing and interpretation of local needs and issues				
	The involvement and ideas of young people are an integral part of decision-making processes				
	Credit is given to young people for their input and ideas				
	Young people understand the scope of their influence				
	Consultation activities are only carried out when young people can genuinely inform and influence the decision making process				
	Young people can easily access decision makers				
	Young people have opportunities to co-produce services where they wish and have the capacity to do so.				
Communication	All publications/ information/correspondence with/for young people is written in plain English				
	Publications/ information/correspondence are available in alternative formats and languages				
	Requests for alternative formats/languages are delivered in a timely manner				
	Publications/ information/correspondence are disseminated to young people as soon as possible				
	Publications/ information/correspondence are disseminated via a range of channels to ensure that they are accessible to young people of all abilities and socioeconomic circumstances				
	Feedback from youth engagement activities is a true representation of the range of views expressed by young people				

Organisational	The service demonstrates a clear commitment to securing effective engagement with young people	38			
	Training is provided to staff to develop the skills and understanding of engaging with young people				
	Our service regularly monitors and evaluates how well young people feel they are involved in decision making and how well services are meeting their needs				
	Our service reserves a budget for youth engagement activities.				
Consistency and Co-ordination	Learning and evaluation helps to shape future youth engagement activities				
	Youth engagement activities are planned well in advance				
	Results of youth engagement activities are shared internally across services				
	Successful youth engagement methods/tools are shared internally across services				
Reaching Everyone	Participation in youth engagement activities reflects the diversity of Falkirk's young people regarding age, gender, gender identity, disability, race, ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation.				
	A range of creative approaches are taken to engage young people from marginalised and underrepresented communities.				
	Barriers to participation are recognised and addressed.				
	A variety of methods are used to make sure a wide range of voices are heard				