

Our Day at the DALC Conference – Okehampton Youth Councillors 30/10/2024

At our conference on 2 October 2024, we were delighted to welcome two of Okehampton's Youth Councillors to the event where they spoke at our Members Panel on Working with Young People.

Eleanor and Meda both joined Okehampton Youth Council earlier this year, and came along to the conference to share their experiences.

We asked them if they could share what they thought of the day, why they're interested in local government, and why it's important for local councils to engage with young people.

Why are you interested in local government?

Eleanor shared that:

As a young person, I often feel as though my voice is insignificant in decisions that affect my life. That is why I am very interested in local government – it's a great way to get involved and make a difference. By engaging with local government, I can help to address issues that impact my community. It also provides valuable experience that can open doors to greater political involvement in the future.



Meda said:

I'm interested in local government because I have always wanted to know how communities are run and the decision making process behind it all so I can be involved myself.

What did you think of the conference?

Eleanor commented that from the DALC conference she was able to learn more about how local councils operate, their structure, and their role in the community. She had the chance to connect with many experienced individuals who provided her with new perspectives and advice on getting involved. She says:

"I was particularly interested in hearing about how Brixham Council dealt with the water issues as it was a real life example of how local governments deal with crises"

Meda enjoyed getting to meet lots of interesting and experienced people at the conference, and learning about a wide variety of roles and areas within local government. She enjoyed the great opportunities for learning, and hearing from people from all sorts of backgrounds.

Both enjoyed being part of the panel with Meda reflecting that it was really valuable as a young person to have the opportunity to speak and share experiences around working with the local council since they could answer questions and think about different perspectives. Eleanor said that:

I enjoyed the panel as a whole because it was amazing to see how the different councils had been engaging their youth! It was good to see the different opportunities that they provided for young people. I am very grateful that I had the opportunity to share my thoughts on youth engagement and talk about the work of our Youth Council. Answering questions allowed me to express the benefits and opportunities that Youth Councils provide while also building my confidence in public speaking.

Why is it important to work with young people?

We asked the youth councillors why they felt it was important for councils to engage with young people. Meda said:

I believe it is really important for young people to work with councils as they are able to have a voice of their own and contribute a new point of view. I also think that raising awareness of the role of local government is valuable as it means that people are more likely to engage and feel connected to their community.

Eleanor added:

It is extremely important for councils to work with young people as they are the future leaders of government. It gives them a voice and helps them to feel heard and empowered.

Personally, I feel as though young people are able to feel more valued when involved and that their opinions can help communities to make more diverse improvements/changes.

How can councils work with young people?

Emma James, clerk to Okehampton Town Council, who spoke during the Members Panel about their experience setting up the Youth Council said:

I was delighted, if not a little daunted, to be asked to give a short presentation at the DALC Conference about Okehampton Youth Council. The Youth Council was set up earlier in the year so is very much still in its infancy. It needs some momentum to progress and attract new members as we currently only have eight Youth Councillors, but we are learning as we go and discussing what and how we can do this.

Two Youth Councillors, Eleanor and Meda, were able to come along to the Conference and answer some questions which, I hope was a beneficial experience both for them and the attendees

Alongside Okehampton, the Members Panel also featured Uplyme Parish Council and how they [involved young people](#) in their project to regenerate green space, and Moretonhampstead Parish Council who [visited the local school](#) to build relationships with young people.

Eleanor said that: *Councils can engage with young people by starting up groups like Youth Councils, organising workshops and working with schools to start community projects. Also, I would suggest asking young people to complete surveys provided in schools which allow them to express their voices and make them feel as though their input is important in local decision making.*

Meda reflected that the *“panel as a whole was really well balanced as it included projects from smaller councils, showcasing how all communities can engage with their youth and that there is a wide range of opportunities available”*.

Thank you so much to the youth councillors for not just attending our conference, but also taking the time to share their experiences with us afterwards. We know they're both busy sixth formers, and are very grateful to them for taking time off school (and all the catch up work entailed) to be there, and we know attendees loved hearing their perspective! We're wishing them both every success in the future!

(Devon Association of Local Councils)